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ABSTRACT

This monograph presents an overview of experiential learning from five perspectives. Following a history of experiential learning in 20th century adult education, the essay first offers a summary of the reflective constructivist view of experiential learning. The constructivist approach is taken by educators seeking to enhance the process of adult learners' reflections on experience, by instigating holistic experiences in instructional settings, by coaching and mentoring adults to enhance their learning in the midst of experience, and by assessing adults' experience. The essay compares these four additional theoretical orientations that have emerged in recent scholarly writing addressing experiential learning and cognition: (1) psychoanalytic perspectives that illuminate desires and resistance emanating from unconscious dimensions of experiential learning; (2) situative perspectives emphasize the connection between individuals and their communities of practice in a collective explanation of experiential learning; (3) critical cultural perspectives focus on how power and inequity structure experience and promote social transformation through experiential learning; and (4) enactivist perspectives uphold an ecological systems understanding of experiential learning co-emerging in systems of human action, organizations, cultures, and nature. For each of these five orientations to experiential learning, influential theories and models are presented, followed by a critique of the orientation from other perspectives. (The monograph contains 151 references.) (KC)

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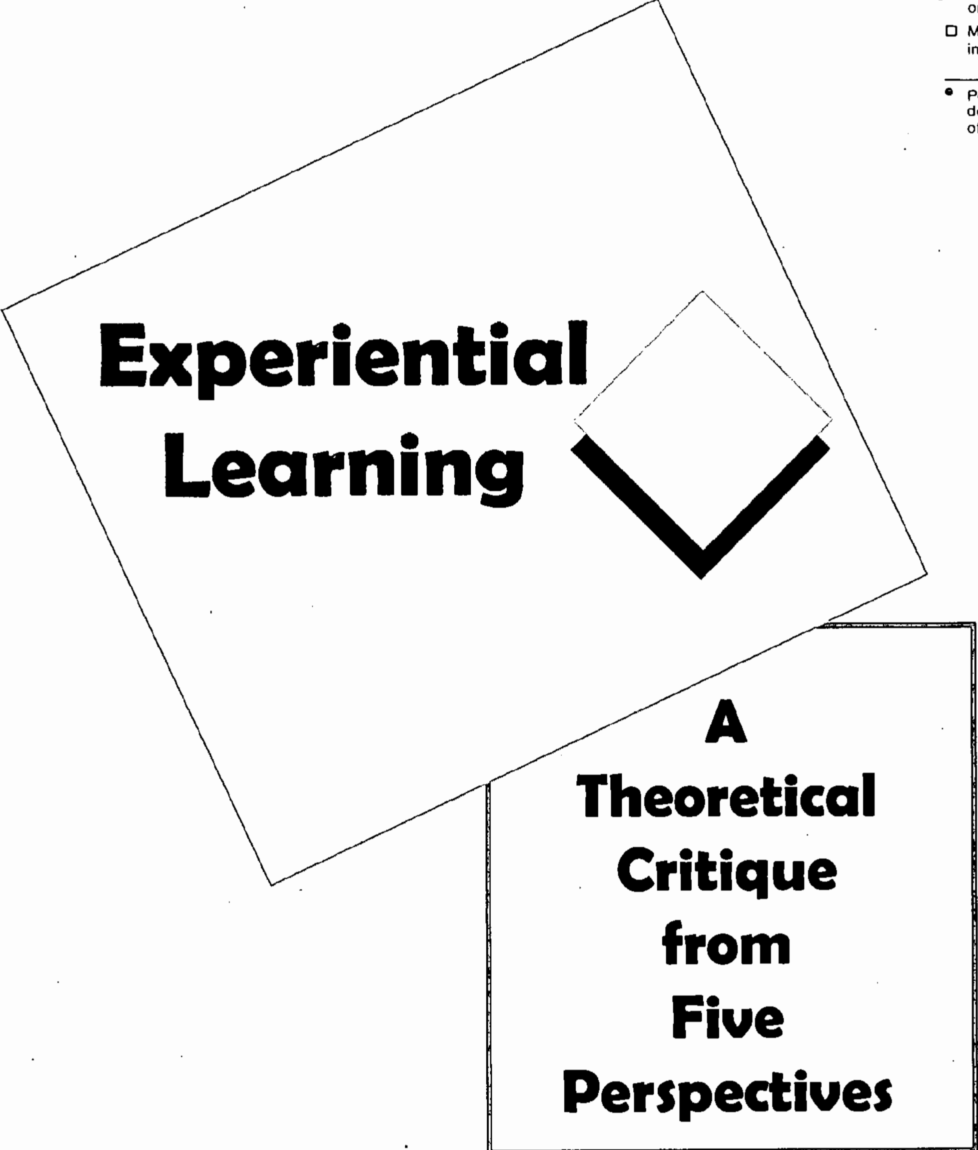

Experiential Learning

A Theoretical Critique from Five Perspectives

by Tara J. Fenwick

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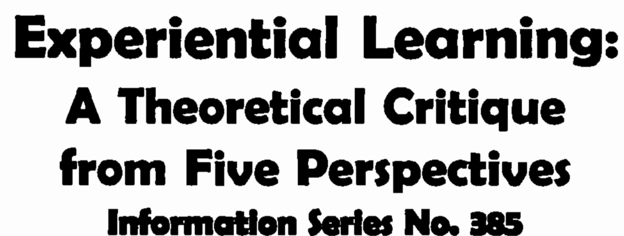

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ERIC/ACVE would like to thank Tara J. Fenwick, Assistant Professor of Adult Education, University of Alberta, for her work in the preparation of this paper. Her research focuses on workplace learning and education, particularly examining production of knowledge and identities in particular cultural-political landscapes. She is the author of numerous articles and chapters on workplace learning, including a chapter on workplace development in the ***Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education*** (Jossey-Bass 2000). She edited ***Work and Leisure*** (McGraw-Hill Ryerson 1996), and is the author, with Jim Parsons, of ***The Art of Evaluation: A Handbook for Educators and Trainers*** (Thompson Educational Publishers 2000), and with Leona English and Jim Parsons, ***Spirituality in Adult Education*** (Krieger Publishing Company).

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What does it mean to learn from experience? And, what, if any, is an appropriate role for educators in this process?

As lifelong learning, workplace learning, informal learning, self-directed learning, and other forms of experiential learning become increasingly prominent in adult education theory and practice, important questions have been raised about how to understand adults' experience, and how to conceptualize the relationships between adults' learning and their own perceptions of their experiences. For educators, these debates provide useful insights for curriculum and instruction. Furthermore, these debates encourage educators to critically question their very purpose, the ethics of their presumption to insert themselves into adults' experience, and the interests served by their approach to "using" experience for learning.

The dominant approach to understanding experiential learning in adult education has revolved around cognitive reflection upon concrete experience, an orientation commonly known as *constructivism*. Educators have developed a variety of ways to enhance this process: by facilitating adults' critical reflection on experience, by instigating holistic "experiences" in instructional settings, by coaching and mentoring adults to enhance their learning in the midst of experience, and by assessing adults' experience. Critiques of these educational practices have attacked educators' movement toward "managing" adults' experience. Criticism has also been leveled at the focus on mental processing, the unproblematic view of identifiable "concrete" experience, the assumption that individuals engage in and reflect upon their experiences as unitary independent selves, and the assumption that individuals are split from their contexts. From a perspective of examining power relations, critique has also explored the ways experience is or is not valued for producing certain desirable knowledge and the sorts of identities that are shaped or excluded when educators "help" people learn from their experiences.

Four alternate orientations on experiential learning have emerged in theories of learning, cognition, and pedagogy in the recent years. These perspectives are useful for educators in shedding light on complex dimensions of the learning-in-experience question. They also help educators with different responses to the question about the most appropriate role for educators in working with adults' experience.

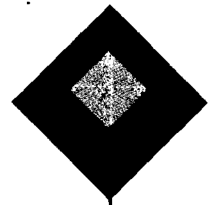
- *Psychoanalytic perspectives* illuminate desires and resistance emanating from unconscious dimensions of experiential learning.
- *Situative perspectives* emphasize the connection between individuals and their communities of practice in a collective explanation of experiential learning.
- *Critical cultural perspectives* focus on how power and inequity structure experience and promote social transformation through experiential learning.
- *Enactivist perspectives* uphold an ecological systems understanding of experiential learning co-emerging in systems of human action, organizations, cultures, and nature.

These orientations each have their own blind spots and have been debated at length.[1] These debates focus on the way knowledge and human experience are understood, the way the person doing the experiencing is represented, the definitions of learning and the conceptualizations of desirable learning outcomes, the role of power and language in learning through experience, and of course, the role of an educator, if any. The five orientations cannot be synthesized, but they do offer insights for one another. Dialogue between and within them is the most valuable legacy for the educator, who ultimately must read across these perspectives and find a path for philosophy and practice that has the greatest integrity, defensibility, and efficacy for his or her own particular context.

Information on the issues of experiential learning may be found in the ERIC database using the following descriptors—*Adult Education, Adult Educators, Autobiographies, *Constructivism (Learning), *Educational Environment, Educational Philosophy, *Experiential Learning, *Power Structure, *Psychiatry—and the identifiers *Complexity Theory, *Critical Pedagogy, Reflective Thinking, and *Situated Cognition. Asterisks indicate descriptors that are particularly relevant.

[1] I wish to express deep appreciation to the four scholars who reviewed an earlier draft of this monograph. Their often detailed engagement in these debates and their critical questions have enriched this document and opened new paths for my own thinking.

Experiential Learning in Adult Education: An Overview of Orientations



Experiential learning is, as Michelson (1996) suggests, arguably one of the most significant areas for current research and practice in adult education. Sometimes called *informal* and *incidental* learning, experiential learning is related to many other concepts in adult learning: self-directed learning, lifelong learning, working knowledge, practical intelligence, and situated learning. The term "experiential learning" in adult education is usually associated with particular theories and practices based on reflection on concrete experience.

In practice, however, it seems counterproductive to separate experiential learning as an evolving adult education practice from a broader consideration of learning through experience. Much adult learning is commonly understood to be located in everyday workplace tasks and interactions, home and family activity, community involvement, and other sites of nonformal education. Many of us believe that our skills and concepts, and certainly the construction of our practical knowledge, the know-how that we use in our daily activities and work, are best learned through "doing."

This monograph presents conventional notions of experiential learning and invites more discussion about alternative conceptions by comparing five perspectives of experiential learning. Experiential learning here means a process of human cognition. The root of the word cognition in fact means "to learn," and thus the two terms are used interchangeably following standard usage within each perspective. The dimension of experience, broadly understood, is defensible as a classifying category in cognition: what manner of learning can be conceived that is not experiential, whether the context be clearly "educational" or not? Experience embraces reflective as well as kinesthetic activity, conscious and unconscious dynamics, and all manner of interaction among subjects, texts, and contexts. Experience flows across arbitrary denominations of formal and informal education, private and public sites of learning, compliant and resistant meaning formation. If the category of experiential learning refers to nonschooled learning, then control and educators' presence are being reified as classifying dimensions. This creates a logical problem in that educators created the category and thus are present in it. In any case, the category implies that some kinds of learning do not incorporate experience, which is an absurd proposition from any definitional viewpoint. Moreover, attempted divisions between human experience and reflection on that experience have proved problematic for all kinds of reasons that are discussed later.

However, the term "experiential learning" is used here both because of its well-established tradition in adult education and to avoid epistemological arguments within broader constructs such as knowledge or cognition. This monograph does not address theories of learning derived from behaviorism or cognitive science, nor does it enter debates about the nature and construction of theoretical or disciplinary knowledge. The discussion is restricted to conceptions of knowledge calling themselves learning, that is,

that situate themselves within a pedagogical frame theorizing some sort of intersection between situation, educator, and subject whose position is designated "learner" by virtue of a traceable developmental moment. In particular, the focus is on contemporary perspectives on learning that are directly linked to individual and collective human actions and interactions, perspectives that perhaps hold greatest promise for future research and practice in adult learning for reasons described in the sections that follow.

To this end, this monograph offers a summary of the reflective constructivist view of experiential learning, then presents in comparison four additional theoretical orientations that have emerged in recent scholarly writing addressing (experiential) learning and cognition. These were selected for discussion here either because of their prominence in recent writing about learning and development, or because they offer an original perspective on the relationships among experience, context, mind, and learning that may raise helpful questions about the dominant constructivist view. For each of these five different orientations to experiential learning, certain influential theories and models are presented, followed by critique of the orientation launched from other perspectives. Space considerations prevent a comprehensive analysis of any particular perspective, and in most cases extended discussion of each is available elsewhere. In this monograph the purpose is to present only a brief overview for comparative purposes, to honor and clarify different perspectives along similar questions of learning so that dialogue among them may continue.

The next section gives an overview of the development of the concept of experiential learning in adult education theory and practice during the 20th century; it introduces certain issues raised by critics about how experiential learning has been incorporated into adult education.

Experiential Learning in 20th-Century Adult Education

Experiential learning first became popular in adult education to celebrate and legitimate people's own experience in their knowledge development. It was one way to acknowledge the process of learning as much as the outcome in terms of new skills and concepts developed. Adult educators were also motivated by a genuine desire to counter a general lack of recognition or reward for experience in workplaces and higher education because experiential knowing has been traditionally uncredentialed. Their pedagogy, when focused on learners' experience, challenged well-established ways of thinking about education as program, the educator as expert knower, and knowledge as theory.

The notion of experiential learning has been used to refer to everything from kinesthetic, directed instructional activities in the classroom to special workplace projects interspersed with "critical dialogue" led by a facilitator to learning generated through social action movements, and even to team-building adventures in the wilderness. Definitional problems continue when one tries to disentangle the notion of experiential learning from experiences commonly associated with formal education, such as class discussions, reading and analysis, and reflection.

Important questions have been raised about the intrusion of educators into people's ongoing experiential learning. Sometimes this educational intrusion becomes management of learning for economic goals, turning experience into a productive object or knowledge. Sometimes the intrusion ensures conformity and upholds existing dominant categories of knowledge, as when adults' experience is shaped and assessed through prior learning assessment processes to fit institutional standards and understandings of knowledge. Sometimes education is surveillance, as when adults are asked to explain their private experience to an educational group or share it in written reflective journals and portfolios. Sometimes educators view experience as something to be produced or designed to "motivate" learners and enhance training. The point is that educators' consideration of and intervention in others' experiential learning are neither neutral nor innocent.

Influential Theories of Experiential Learning in Adult Education

Progressive educator John Dewey, in his classic book ***Experience and Education*** first published in 1938, challenged the reigning pedagogy and justified education based on learning by doing. He showed how individuals create new knowledge and transform themselves through a process of learning by performing new roles. Dewey was interested in education for a democracy, the social nature of learning, and internal growth and process. He emphasized that not all experience educates. We have all witnessed or lived through episodes from which people can emerge apparently unchanged, not having learned lessons that others have attended to in the same experience. As well, sometimes we learn things from our experience that are actually dysfunctional for our growth or prevent us from reaching our goals. Dewey wrote that, for learning to happen, an experience must include two key dimensions. The first is *continuity*: the learner needs to be able to connect aspects of the new experience to what he or she already knows, in ways that modify this knowledge. The second is *interaction*: the learner needs to be actively interacting with his or her environment, testing out lessons developed in that environment. Dewey believed the educator should help link disparate experiences into a coherent whole.

Moses Coady and Jimmy Tompkins animated the Antigonish Movement in Nova Scotia in the 1920s on principles of adults learning through the experience of action to improve their economic quality of life, creating what they needed through small groups. Civil activism such as Myles Horton's work (see Adams 1975) at Tennessee's Highlander Center during the 1950s and 1960s was committed to learning through social action: small groups decided the issues of their oppression, then together learned the necessary resources (including liberating their own creativity) to take action toward resolving these issues.

With the rise of humanistic psychology in the 1960s and 1970s, experiential learning, which emphasized placing the learner at the heart of the learning process, began to acquire status as a movement. Malcolm Knowles (1970) in particular focused North American adult educators' attention on the importance of experience as one of the five principles of his theory of "andragogy" or adult learning. Knowles argued for a learner-centered educational process, in which adult learners are encouraged to reflect upon and

share their biographies of experience rather than simply accept the authority of texts (content) foreign to their own experiences. Knowles' ideas are responsible for a sweeping wave of change in the 1970s, as lecturers became facilitators of dialogue and learners exercised voice in determining the issues, goals, and applications of course materials.

Other writers on experiential learning include David Kolb (whose 1984 model of experiential learning is described in the next chapter), Jack Mezirow (who developed a theory of transformative learning describing critical reflection on experience), and Paulo Freire (whose theory of conscientization and praxis, learning through radical action combined with critical reflection, has galvanized emancipatory education around the world). Donald Schön popularized an approach to professional education he called "reflection-in-action," which acknowledged that important learning unfolds through problem solving in the heat of everyday "messy" experience, where problems are ill structured, outcomes uncertain, and situational dimensions constantly shifting.

David Boud and his associates (Boud and Walker 1991; Boud, Cohen, and Walker 1993) have also written extensively on experiential learning in adult education. They maintain, as do others, that learners must be (consciously) engaged for learning to occur at any level. Like Kolb, Knowles, Mezirow, and Freire, Boud and Walker (1991) assume that our construction of learning from experience is an intentional act: as learners we are always actively pursuing knowledge and will find opportunities for learning in a variety of situations, whether labeled educative or not. Theories of informal learning, such as the model presented by Watkins and Marsick (1992), showed how adults often learn to understand puzzling new situations or develop new skills without going near a classroom. They suggested that, although informal learning is planned and intentional (though controlled by the learner), incidental learning occurs almost unconsciously, such as when we start a new job and before long, find out we have just "absorbed" important cultural knowledge about the politics and norms of the organization. Some writers describe this continuous active pursuit of knowledge as ongoing meaning making. Proponents of a movement in using life history and autobiography for pedagogical purposes have argued that an important need for many adults in a postmodern time of fragmentation and anxiety is to find coherence in their experiences and celebrate their meaning (e.g., West 1996).

The term experiential learning is often used to distinguish ongoing meaning making from theory and nondirected "informal" life experience from "formal" education. This is why experiential learning was often understood to be radical, associated with learner empowerment, and its proponents sometimes evangelistic in tone. In direct challenge to disciplinary bodies of theoretical and canonical knowledge, educational interest in experiential learning has typically championed recognition and valuing of the learner's personal practical knowledge and informal or incidental experience. As Reeve and Gallacher (1999) argue, "taking experience as the starting point for learning has the potential at least to erode traditional boundaries between knowledge and skills, vocational and academic learning, and between disciplines" (p. 127). Much of the focus on experiential learning throughout the 20th century has intended to challenge prevailing orthodoxy that worthwhile or legitimate education is planned and properly accredited and occurs only in programs, institutions, and classrooms. For some, learner empowerment has

meant transformation through recognizing the power of one's own (informal) experience and naming the oppressions one has suffered, as a step toward personal emancipation and possibly taking action for change. However, others argue there has been a shift, that experiential learning is itself becoming institutionalized and developing its own orthodoxies (some of these, such as Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning, are discussed in chapter 2). As Griffin (1992) claims:

> We are witnessing the transformation of experiential learning from a progressive educational movement towards reconstruction as an object of institutional policy and professional good practice. As such, it is being incorporated or absorbed into the formal system of educational provision. (p. 31)

In an attempt to reconcile various positions and search for the "essences" of adult experiential learning, Malinen (2000) presents a comparison of the theories of Malcolm Knowles, David Kolb, Jack Mezirow, Reg Revans (discussed in chapter 3), and Donald Schön. She states:

> Adult experiential learning is a complex, vague and ambiguous phenomenon, which is still inadequately defined, conceptually suspect—and even poorly researched ... on the other hand, its theoretical and philosophical foundations are fragmented and confusing .... There are too many interpretations and priorities among the theorists and practitioners that no single, clear definition of these foundations could be constructed. (p. 15)

Amidst this apparent ambivalence, the questions for adult education that continue to be debated are, What is the nature of the intersection between individual(s), situation, social relationships, and knowing? Is there a legitimate role for an educator in this process? If so, what purposes should guide this role?

Categorizing Different Views of Experiential Learning

It should be clear by now that there are different schools of thought regarding the nature of experiential learning. Järvinen (1998) categorizes these as three main perspectives:

1. What may be called the *phenomenological tradition* of Boud and his associates and Schön analyzes emotional states, suggesting that reflection begins by analyzing the learner's way of observing, communicating, thinking, and acting.

2. The *critical theory tradition* of Habermas, Mezirow, and Freire views critical self-reflection as a central element of adult learning and development, with the aim of experiential learning being to correct political and social factors that limit a learner's development.

3. The *situated and action theory traditions* of situated cognition and enactivism (explained in chapter 3) stress the role of cultural action and its analysis, criticizing those who divorce the concept of experience from its socio-historical roots.

Each of these three views offers a different way to understand the nature of experience and its relation to learning. All three rest on particular assumptions about what knowledge is, how it is constructed, how to view knowers, and how knowers are related to their contexts. These assumptions are expanded in chapter 3. In terms of the practice of adult education itself in the area of experiential learning, Warner Weil and McGill (1989) have distinguished four different forms of educational practice that they call "villages":

1. **Accrediting learning derived from experience for purpose of entry to educational progression or employment**. This is variously called Assessment of Prior Experience and Learning (APEL), Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), or Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). For educators gathered in this "village," reflection is about recording and assessing experience. The first model was the U.S. GI Bill of 1946, which dealt with returning World War II veterans who wanted their experience credited in order to enter university, so it was assessed using traditional university course materials.

2. **Using experiential learning to challenge higher and continuing education schools and curriculum.** Deriving from the progressive tradition of Dewey, educators help learners unveil their hidden untapped knowledge through reflection on life experience.

3. **Focusing on social change.** In this radical tradition, educators help learners see outside their private world of reflection and become aware of the broader sociocultural dynamics and history shaping both their life experience and their ways of reflecting on it.

4. **Focusing on individual development.** From a humanist perspective, educators in this village encourage learners' reflection for personal growth, taking responsibility for one's self-learning.

The organizing principle governing the division of practice into these villages is the purpose of the educator in terms of desired outcomes for the learner. The villages do not distinguish between ways of actually conceptualizing experience and the process of cognition or "learning" entangled within it. Saddington (1998) builds on Warner Weil and McGill's (1989) four villages of educational purpose to show how different dimensions of experiential learning come together with adult education practice. Saddington works from three basic orientations of educational practice to examine different dimensions of experiential learning:

1. **Progressive**, focusing on the individuals' responsibility toward their society and viewing education as a problem-solving instrument of social and political reform.

2. **Humanist**, focusing on the learner at the center of a process of discovery and self-actualization, in a drive toward personal enrichment, integration, and psychological development.

3. **Radical**, focusing on societal and individual liberation through questioning and reinterpreting the very cultural assumptions of experience, and moving to action for transformation.

	Progressive	Humanist	Radical
Social problem taken most seriously	Social change	Personal meaningfulness	Oppression
Underlying theory of social development	Reform	Self-actualization	Social transformation
Best metaphor for educational practice	Problem solving	Personal growth	Empowerment
Key value	Democracy	Acceptance	Freedom
What counts as "knowledge"?	Judgment and the ability to act	Wholeness	Praxis (reflective thought and action)
The educator's task	Guiding	Support	Conscientization
How an educated person is described	Responsible	Integrated	Liberated
Role of the learner's life experience	A source of learning and inseparable from knowledge	The source of knowledge and the content of curriculum	Basic to understanding societal contexts and the source of knowledge
Types of experience mainly used	Structured	Personal focus	Self in society
Villages at work	1 & 2	1 & 4	3

Source: Saddington, T. "Exploring the Roots and Branches of Experiential Learning." ***Lifelong Learning in Europe*** 3, no. 3 (1998), p. 134. Reprinted by permission.

This chart is useful to illustrate how important dimensions such as the type and role of experience in the learner's life are understood differently in various educational orientations. Educators might find they can situate their personal understanding and practice of experiential learning with these distinctions.

However, all three orientations and four villages that Saddington works with presume the same basic conceptualization of experiential learning: an independent learner, cognitively reflecting on concrete experience to construct new understandings, perhaps with the assistance of an educator, toward some social goal of progress or improvement. As explained in chapter 3, this is only one of many alternative conceptions of the actual pro-

cess of experiential learning. However, very different perspectives have emerged, each arguing a distinct way of understanding the nature of experience. These perspectives are presented in chapters 2 and 3.

Conclusion

In sum, this chapter invites readers to consider two primary questions:

> *What is the nature of the intersection between individual(s), situation, and knowing? and, Is there a legitimate role for an educator in this process?*

This chapter shows the rise of focus on experiential learning in adult education as both a philosophy and a technique, usually focusing on the relationships between an individual, his or her reflective processes, and something called concrete experience. Different approaches to experiential learning in adult education are presented to help readers understand the strongest themes that have emerged historically in experiential learning as practice, including Warner Weil and McGill's concept of four villages and Saddington's classification of experiential learning according to progressive, humanist, and radical educational orientations. The discussion shows that although useful, these conceptions all assume the presence of an educator in adults' learning from experience. Furthermore, all assume that learning happens through cognitive reflection, experience can be considered like a bounded object, and an individual "learner" can be separated from his or her experience to process knowledge from that experience. The discussion then provides a brief overview of complex dimensions that call into question simplistic understandings of the relation between experience, human beings, and knowledge. These dimensions include individuals' purposes, modes of interpretation and engagement in experience, understandings of self and subjectivity, the relation between individuals and their contexts, and dimensions of gender, culture, class, and so forth that fundamentally structure how experience and knowledge are understood. Finally, the discussion outlines some educational practices and raises questions about the political implications of an educator's presence in an adult's experience.

Constructivism

The focus of the first chapter is on the background and dimensions of experiential learning, both as a philosophy and as a practice in adult education. Chapter 2 focuses on the dominant understanding of experiential learning in adult education, called in this monograph a *reflection* orientation, or "constructivism." The corresponding educational approach is a humanistic, learner-centered practice that assists adult learners in reflecting on their experience in order to construct new knowledge.

This chapter presents the fundamental bases of this constructivist conception of experiential learning and various prominent models that have influenced its practice in past decades. Four roles for educators are discussed, with various practical suggestions for activities and approaches generated by these roles. This information is presented for readers' cautious use, remembering the challenges to ideas for practice mentioned in the first chapter.

Chapter 2 ends with a discussion of critiques that challenge the constructivist orientation to experiential learning in adult education. Of particular concern here is the potential for reductionism and overdetermination of complex human experience when translated into "objects" of knowledge. Even more serious, the potential for the educator to colonize and regulate private human experience is great.

Learning through Reflection on Experience: The Theory

The most prevalent understanding of experiential learning is based on reflection. This casts the individual as a central actor in a drama of personal meaning making. The learner supposedly reflects on lived experience, then interprets and generalizes this experience to form mental structures. These structures are knowledge, stored in memory as concepts that can be represented, expressed, and transferred to new situations. Theoretical models in this perspective explain ways people attend to and perceive experience, interpret and categorize it as concepts, then continue adapting or transforming their conceptual structures. Individuals are understood to construct their own knowledge, through interaction with their environments. This school of thought is commonly known as "constructivism." Critics of this perspective and alternative explanations of experiential learning take exception to the way the "individual" is considered fundamentally separate from his or her environment and relations with others. They argue that reflective processes cannot be separated from some sort of event called "experience."

Constructivism has a long and distinguished history, although many different perspectives coexist within it[1] (Piaget 1966; Von Glaserfeld 1984; Vygotsky 1978; Wells 1995), portraying learners as independent constructors of their own knowledge, with varying capacity or confidence to rely on their own constructions. However, all views share one

[1]Phillips (1995) identifies six distinct views of constructivism varying according to the emphasis accorded either to individual psychology or public disciplines in constructing knowledge, the extent to which knowledge is viewed as made rather than discovered, and the emphasis put on the individual knower as active agent rather than spectator in the construction of knowledge.

central premise: a learner is believed to construct, through reflection, a personal understanding of relevant structures of meaning derived from his or her action in the world.

The Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1966), after observing children learn through play, described this construction process as oscillating between *assimilation* and *accommodation*. He suggested that learning happens when individuals interact with objects in their environment (which can be material things, names for things, concepts, relationships, etc.) to "build" and refine constructs of knowledge in their heads. Individuals sometimes assimilate new objects of knowledge by incorporating them into their personal internal network of knowledge constructs. Other times individuals accommodate, by altering these constructs when confronting new experiences that may contradict their past knowledge. The important issue is that each individual is active in the learning process, not passively absorbing whatever happens, and each person may construct very different understandings after interacting with the same objects in the same environment. This notion challenged ideas of knowledge as a body of information created by scientists and experts, existing outside of individuals, and "learning" as a process of ingesting these others' knowledge.

Lev Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the role of individuals' interactions with their sociocultural environment in this process of constructing knowledge. He developed a theory of what he called the "zone of proximal development," a time-bounded site of community activity surrounding a person that can limit or enhance cognitive development. The person learns by engaging fully in this zone, particularly through dialogue. Vygotsky's ideas have been influential in subsequent situative theories of learning, described in chapter 3. However, Vygotsky, like other constructivists, believed that the outcome and objective of learning was the development of individual consciousness, experiencing self-mastery, through a process of reflection (what Vygotsky called "inner speech") as well as interaction with people and objects in the external world.

David Kolb: A Constructivist Model of Experiential Learning

In the literature of adult learning this constructivist view is embedded in the writings of David Boud and associates (Boud and Miller 1996; Boud, Keogh, and Walker 1996), David Kolb (1984), Dorothy MacKeracher (1996), Jack Mezirow (1990), Donald Schön (1983), Jack Mezirow (1991, 1994), and many others. David Kolb (1984) developed a theory that attempted to clarify exactly how different people learn by integrating their concrete emotional experiences with reflection. For him, reflection is all about cognitive processes of conceptual analysis and eventual understanding. Kolb believed that experiential learning is a tension- and conflict-filled process that occurs in a cycle. New knowledge and skills are achieved through confrontation among concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and subsequent active experimentation.

First, the learner lives through some kind of *concrete experience*. This could be a simulated experience developed especially for a learning situation, such as a case study or role play, or an exercise involving the learner in actually experimenting with the skills to be learned. Or this could be a real life or workplace experience that the learner has encoun-

tered. Second, the learner takes some time for *reflective observation*. The learner asks of the experience: What did I observe? What was I aware of? What does this experience mean to me? How might this experience have been different?

Third, the learner uses insights gained through the reflective observation to create an *abstract conceptualization*. This is where the learner asks: What principle seems to be operating here? What general 'rule-of-thumb' have I learned here? What new understanding does this experience reveal about myself, or people, or how things work in particular situations? Finally, the learner applies the new learning through *active experimentation*. The learner asks, What will I do next time? How will I adopt this principle for other contexts? The new "principle" is tested out in similar situations, then in different situations, and the learner continues to revise and reshape the learning based on what happens through experimenting with it. The learner may not actually test out the new skill, but may simply think through its application.

Kolb and other theorists maintain that, although all adults are exposed to a multitude of life experiences, not everyone learns from these experiences. Experience alone does not teach. Learning happens only when there is reflective thought and internal processing of that experience by the learner, in a way that actively makes sense of the experience, links the experience to previous learning, and transforms the learner's previous understandings in some way.

David Boud: Considering Context in Experiential Learning

Boud and Walker (1991) introduced a model of experiential learning similar to Kolb's, with two main enrichments: they acknowledged that specific contexts shape an individual's experience in different ways, and they were interested in how differences among individuals—particularly their past histories, learning strategies, and emotion—influence the sort of learning developed through reflection on experience. For Boud and Walker, the extent of our learning corresponds to the way we *prepare* for an experience; the *noticing and intervening* of our participation in the actual experience; and the processes we use to recall and *reevaluate* an experience, attend to feelings the experience provoked, and reevaluate the experience. In preparation we examine the opportunities of the milieu and form particular intentions. We also bring certain skills and strategies of observation and meaning making as well as personal histories of past experience.

During a particular experience we each notice and intervene with different elements of the milieu depending on our individual predispositions. We balance our observations with awareness of our own reactions; we choose ways to participate in the activity, name the learning process, respond to different events, and deal with the unexpected—all by reflecting in action. Afterwards we recall and reevaluate our experiences through four processes. *Association* is relating new information to familiar concepts. *Integration* is seeking connection between the new and the old. *Appropriation* is personalizing the new knowledge to make it our own, and *validation* is determining the authenticity of our new ideas and the feelings of the experience. Notice that this model dwells especially on feelings, claiming that "negative" feelings, if not attended to, can block potential learning

in the experience. Boud and his associates also show the importance of the preparation or readiness the learner brings to the experience and the significance of the particular context in which the learner is acting.

Donald Schön: Reflection-in-Action

Schön, whose books include ***The Reflective Practitioner*** (1983) and ***Educating the Reflective Practitioner*** (1987), has been a significant promoter of constructivism to understand workplace learning. Schön's view is that professionals live in a world of uncertainty, instability, complexity, and value conflict, where they often must deal with problems for which no existing rules or theories learned through formal training or past experience can apply. He was most interested in how reflection, and particularly critical reflection, plays out in the ongoing learning of professionals in their practice. He proposed that practitioners learn by noticing and framing problems of interest to them in particular ways, then inquiring and experimenting with solutions. When they experience surprise or discomfort in their everyday activity, this reflective process begins. Their knowledge is constructed through reflection during and after some experimental action on the ill-defined and messy problems of practice.

When these adults meet such unique problems or situations containing some element of surprise, they are prompted to *reflect-in-action* by improvising an on-the-spot experimentation, thinking up and testing out and refining and retesting various solutions for the problem. Schön says professionals also often *reflect-on-action* in some zone of time after a problem episode, when they examine what they did, how they did it, and what alternatives exist. Other theorists of learning have continued to refine Schön's ideas of reflective practice. We have seen how Boud and Walker emphasized readiness and attention to feelings in reflection. Watkins and Marsick (1992) formulated a theoretical framework of informal and incidental learning to show how people's experiential learning is not always conscious and may simply reproduce the (sometimes dysfunctional or erroneous) beliefs of their surrounding contexts. Watkins and Marsick stress the importance of Schön's notion of problem framing that tests the assumptions of our reflections. Garrick (1998) also reminds us that experience is constituted by the particular discourses comprising a situation: these shape the way we perceive "routine" and "nonroutine" problems, which we approach and reflect upon differently.

Critical reflection, says Schön, is more than simply reflecting-in or reflecting-on action. When people engage in critical reflection, they question the way they framed the problem in the first place. Even if no apparent problems exist, the practitioner questions situations, asking why things are they way they are, why events unfold in the way they do. This is critical reflection to problematize what otherwise are taken-for-granted situations. As well, people reflect critically when they problematize their own actions, asking: Why did I do what I did? What beliefs inform my practice, and how are these beliefs helping or hindering my work? Schön's work celebrated the experiential learning of practitioners in everyday action—what he called the "swampy lowlands" of actual practice—and attempted to challenge the "high road" of theoretical knowledge, technical rationality, over which universities hold authority.

Brookfield (1987, 1995) and Mezirow (1990, 1991, 1994) both have made considerable contributions to constructivist views of adult learning by theorizing how critical reflection interrupts and reconstructs human beliefs. Brookfield (1995) suggested that when we reflect on our experience with skeptical questioning and imaginative speculation, we can refine, deepen, or correct our knowledge constructions. He describes three stages in the process of reflecting critically: "(1) identifying the assumptions that underlie our thoughts and actions; (2) scrutinizing the accuracy and validity of these in terms of how they connect to, or are discrepant with, our experience of reality; and (3) reconstituting these assumptions to make them more inclusive and integrative" (p. 177).

Jack Mezirow: Reflection on Experience for Transformation

In 1978 Mezirow presented a theory of learning, explained exhaustively in his book ***Transformative Learning*** (1991), in which reflection on experience and particularly critical reflection are central. Transformative learning has become one of the most influential ideas in the field of adult learning and development to emerge in the past 20 years. Mezirow has continued to argue, throughout the exhaustive debates gathering around his theory,[2] that when individuals cognitively reflect on their own fundamental understandings (formed through their biographies of experience), they transform these basic knowledge structures or "meaning perspectives" to become more "inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective, and integrative of experience" (Mezirow 1991, p. 14). This process of perspective transformation is fundamentally based upon a "reflective assessment of premises ... [and] of movement through cognitive structures by identifying and judging presuppositions .... Reflection is the apperceptive process by which we change our minds, literally and figuratively" (pp. 5, 9).

Mezirow's theory of transformative learning is based on a trilevel concept of critical reflection on experience. Mezirow suggests that when an adult encounters a "disorienting dilemma," a problem for which there is no immediately apparent solution suggested by past experience and knowledge, reflection is often triggered. First, individuals often reflect on the *content* of the experience—what happened—which may or may not lead to learning. If individuals find and test a solution to the problem that produces undesirable outcomes, they often reflect upon the *process* they employed—how did it happen. Thus procedural learning results as learners analyze and learn from faulty choices. But when the reflection process probes the very *premises* (deep-seated beliefs and assumptions guiding action) upon which we have based our problem-solving processes, then critical reflection results. Others' views can act as mirrors for our own views, opening a dialectic, helping us "unfreeze" our "meaning perspectives" (Mezirow 1991) and assumptions. In this third level of reflection we confront and challenge the taken-for-granted norms—what's wrong with how I am seeing what happened and how it happened?—leading to a dramatic shift or *transformation* in the learner's way of viewing the world. Mezirow (1991) describes this process of transformative learning as the "bringing of one's assumptions, premises, criteria, and schemata into consciousness and vigorously critiquing them" (p. 29).

[2]For a clear and thorough explanation of both Mezirow's theory and his many critics, as well as empirical studies applying the theory of transformative learning to various contexts of adult experience, consult ***The Theory and Practice of Transformative Learning*** by Taylor (1998).

Roles for Adult Educators Suggested by the Constructivist/Reflective Orientation: Facilitator, Instigator, Coach, and Assessor

In this constructivist view of experiential learning, in which individuals are presumed to interpret their worlds actively and create their own knowledge through different processes of reflection, adult educators have suggested various ways for themselves to assist and perhaps enhance learners' reflective processes. In this section, four main educative roles are discussed:

- **Facilitator**—adult educators encourage people to recall, value, talk about, and perhaps critically analyze their own past experience to construct knowledge from it.
- **Instigator**—educators create a happening during instruction designed to engage learners "experientially" and thus encourage construction of knowledge.
- **Coach**—an educator guides learners to reflect on choices in the "hot action" of experience, so they will analyze undesirable outcomes and make corrections.
- **Assessor**—educators represent, judge, and give credit to people's experiences in terms of the kind of knowledge they have constructed from these experiences.

Obviously these roles are not distinct and separate in practice, but are often blended.

A model created by Caffarella and Barnett (1994) suggests that, in any one of these roles, issues of program planning, philosophy, learning activity and assessment are entwined. Caffarella and Barnett created this model for educators working with experiential learning based on constructivism. It points to four basic elements deserving consideration by any educator or educational intervention, regardless of which of the four roles form the central orientation: understanding learner differences and needs, applying concepts of reflection on concrete experience, using experiential methods and techniques, and assessing learning in ways that honor experience.

Characteristics and Needs of Learners

attending to learners' prior knowledge and experience, their different processes, the contexts of their lives, and their affiliation (belonging) needs

Conceptual Foundations of Experiential Learning

constructivist understandings of learning, especially Kolb's theory of concrete experience with reflection on that experience and Schön's theory of reflective practice

Methods and Techniques for Engaging Learners in Experiential Learning Activities

designing in-class activities, designing field experiences, and creating situations where learners' past experiences are discussed and processed

Assessment Processes and Outcomes

such as portfolios and other self-assessment practices that honor individual experiences and personal knowledge constructed from them

Although these considerations should be integrated into any educator's intervention, the four roles described next each illustrate a different emphasis that educators appear to take when employing experiential learning. These four roles are presented as suggestions for educators incorporating experiential learning. They share a particular assumption with the Caffarella and Barnett model—that an educative event involves a classroom, an educator programming and evaluating people's progress, activities specifically focused on learning, and an assumption that people learn by reflecting on experience. It is important to note that this assumption is not shared by all writers advocating experiential learning. In chapter 3, suggestions for educators are rather different given very different premises about what comprises an educative event.

Adult Educator as Facilitator of Experiential Learning

When Knowles (1984) focused attention on the importance of adults' experience in their learning and the value of reflecting on that experience as a pedagogical process, adult educators began to view themselves as facilitators of learning. Their role was not so much to dispense information and concepts as to encourage people to reflect upon and analyze their experiences. Educational suggestions grounded in Knowles' concepts included directives such as the following:

- Learners' past experience should be honored and given voice;
- Learners' past experience should be shared and compared;
- Learners should be assisted in actively seeking links between specific past experience and their current situations;
- Learners' past experience should be analyzed and perhaps reconstructed; and
- Learners should be helped to form links between their past experience and their beliefs about themselves, how things work, what is important, and what things mean.

Experiential learning, as Boud and his associates pointed out, often involves strong emotions. Therefore, a key responsibility of the facilitator of such learning is creating an environment of trust, authenticity, integrity, and mutual respect—as well as patience with each other on the part of all participants, learners as well as facilitator. For many people, self-disclosure is uncomfortable and inappropriate in group settings. They would prefer solitude and self-dialogue to critical reflection in conversation. And as Boud also concluded, there may be periods in our lives when we are more predisposed to reflection on experiential learning. There may be a "readiness" factor at work, a reflective learning style, or a lifespan issue of particular crises or transitions that prompt our motivation to reflect critically on who we are and where we're going. Some theorists have questioned the assumption that every adult is capable of or even interested in critical reflection.

Brookfield (1995) reminds educators that they need to revisit and analyze their own "visceral" experiences before asking learners to do so. Similarly, Cranton (1996) suggests that above all educators should be "adult learners striving to update, develop, expand, and deepen their professional perspectives both on their subject areas and on their goals and roles" (p. 228). Thus in this role the educator intends to facilitate, as Taylor (1998) puts it, "a learning situation that is democratic, open, rational, has access to all available

information, and promotes critical reflection" (p. 49). However, balancing this role with the educator's own healthy and critical self-reflexiveness about one's intents and perspectives is crucial.

Adult Educator as Instigator of Experiential Learning

As discussed earlier, experiential learning can result from eliciting adults' past experience and encouraging focused reflection and analysis of it, from coaching someone to reflect during actual situated experience, or from creating an "experiential happening." Usually, the latter approach is related to formal education, an institutional classroom or training session in which an educator wishes to engage the learners physically and emotionally. Such created experiences are considered most effective when reflection for learning is carefully layered into the experience, usually through dialogue debriefing the experience.

Educators can introduce "experiential" learning into a formal learning situation in a variety of ways. Three are described here: (1) experiential classroom exercises; (2) adventure activities; and (3) problem-based or project-based learning.

Adult educators have experimented with a variety of creative ways to involve learners physically, emotionally, and relationally as well as cognitively in learning activities. Simulations are one example. (For example, give everyone in the group a particular role with its own agenda, history, and resources, then assign a task requiring each participant to interact with others to achieve his or her goal.) Instructional games and icebreakers are widely available, e.g., ***Games Trainers Play*** by Newstrom and Scannell (1980) or Renner's (1994) ***The Art of Teaching Adults***. Role play is often used to practice interpersonal skills, for example, having pairs act out situations to explore possible approaches to handling them or improvise a scenario to see what might happen if particular actions are taken. Popular theatre technique has been adapted in adult education as an instrument of personal empowerment and cultural intervention (Prentki and Selman 2000). Short physical team problem-solving activities have been borrowed from adventure education. The point of such "experiential" classroom exercises is to stimulate participants' creativity and holistic engagement by leading them to act in unfamiliar situations.

Adventure activities are becoming increasingly popular in workplace training, particularly leadership education and team development (Richards 1992). The facilitator designs a sequence of concrete problem-solving challenges, usually set outdoors, and groups of learners work together to solve them. These might be specific challenges of risk taking such as scaling a mountain or challenges of survival in the wilderness. According to Richards, proponents of adventure activities believe the challenge and unusual setting engage and motivate learners; supposedly increase risk taking, communication, productivity; and help increase insights into barriers to their team processes. However, purveyors of organizational training and development using adventure education report the difficulty of assessing in any reliable way the learning outcomes of such programs and their impact on individual and organizational effectiveness. Educators may be more concerned about the personal and political consequences of a collaborative "managed" adventure on workers and their organizational relationships in the return phase.

Problem-based learning (PBL) typically organizes curriculum around a series of cases, each presenting a dilemma of practice (Albanese and Mitchell 1993; Norman and Schmidt 1992; Walton and Matthews 1989). These cases are usually prepared in detail, researched and based on an actual situation. Learners read, "diagnose," and discuss the case, exploring strategies for analyzing the issues and taking action on the problems. Some, such as Fenwick and Parsons (1998), have criticized this approach for predetermining problems and removing them from the multiple pressures and political dynamics of actual situations—in other words, for defeating the point of learning amidst the unpredictable, multidimensional, and fluid nature of living professional practice. Project-based learning involves structuring a curriculum around projects that the learners formulate. Unlike PBL, learners choose and take responsibility for completing a concrete project that is "authentic" (similar to or driven by an actual work task requiring completion). In the process of working through the project, learners must solve a variety of practical and philosophical problems.

Adult Educator as Coach of Experiential Learning

Mentors and coaches usually work one on one with someone *in situ*, that is, within the actual context of a person's practice. For Daloz (1999), mentors play a significant role in an adult's development and transformation by providing support, structure, positive expectations, self-disclosure, challenging tasks and questions, advocacy, high standards, modeling, maps, language, and a mirror for an adult's growth.

In contrast, coaching is usually associated with specific skill learning. For example, professional practitioners such as teachers, doctors, nurses, accountants, and lawyers experience a period of internship as part of their training, when they are assigned to a particular organization to carry out regular duties with the assistance of a coach—an experienced practitioner familiar with the organizational context. Schön described the role of coach in detail in his influential book ***Educating the Reflective Practitioner*** (1987). The coach provides encouragement, asking Where does it go from here? The coach also draws attention to strategies the student already knows or can observe from fellow students and other available models. The coach often shares personal experiences and encourages other learners to do the same to show the universal commonality of problems they experienced and demonstrates alternative strategies to achieve the desired effects. Above all, coaches must help learners accept that learning takes time.

Adult Educator as Assessor of Experiential Learning

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), Assessment of Prior Experience and Learning (APEL), or Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) are processes being adopted by many postsecondary institutions and adult education programs through which learners seek academic course credit for their life experiences. As Harris (1999) explains, adults have often developed valuable knowledge and skills throughout their study, work, travel, volunteer, family, and leadership experiences in contexts and social practices that do not easily fit the disciplinary concepts valued in a formal education program. PLA tries to recognize this life experience so that learners can avoid repeating courses presenting knowledge

they have already gained and show they have met the requirements to enter courses at their own level of understanding and skill. Hull (1992) describes the variety of tools employed in PLA processes to help learners reflect on, articulate, and demonstrate their past learning. Examples include portfolios, skill development profiles, written analysis of life experience, and challenge tests to demonstrate sufficient prior knowledge to obtain credit for a course.

The institution then matches the learner's experiential learning as reflected in PLA to its own established academic standards, so that credit can be awarded by a credentialing body. Many learners need help completing a PLA process, and institutions often provide workshops to assist in the process. PLA provides a rare opportunity to explore life experiences and accomplishments in depth, and so can really build learner's confidence and pride. PLA also can be a helpful ongoing process of reflection and self-assessment for the learner. It focuses on competency and understandings rather than grades, and it is often billed as a useful career planner. It helps learners actually recognize what they know and can do.

The downside of PLA, as Michelson (1996) points out, is the difficulty of articulating experiential learning. Not all learners have the means to express or demonstrate their understandings, especially when PLA often depends on writing ability. In addition, institutions ask learners to organize their life experiences according to only those competencies and concepts that the institution has decided are valuable. This may narrow and exclude the rich experiences of many adult learners. As Harris (1999) notes, processes commonly used for Recognition of Prior Learning can be prescriptive and limiting. They can be easily dominated by the excessive power of institutions to determine where the knowledge boundaries are placed and how the learner's experience is to be "regulated" to fit particular hierarchical categories of experience that are deemed worthy of recognition. Harris also suggests that there are different, more inclusive ways to assess adults' prior learning. She suggests that knowledge boundaries be negotiated among learners, academics, and representatives of workplace or other contexts in which learners must function. These negotiations may encourage a permeability of boundaries and recognize contextualized, action-oriented knowledge produced in social practices, as well as knowledge that fits disciplinary categories.

In reality, these four educator roles in experiential learning—facilitator, instigator, coach, and assessor—often blur within the actual activities that unfold in a learning event and embrace the four basic instructional elements described by Caffarella and Barnett (1994). Overall, four themes are apparent throughout this discussion of the educator's role according to the constructivist orientation:

1. Engaging learners in concrete experience as a starting point for building new knowledge
2. Creating conditions for educative dialogue during and after the concrete experience
3. Encouraging learners' focused reflection at different levels
4. Providing support, as experiential learning can be confusing, emotionally challenging, unfamiliar, and uncomfortable for learners.

The following section presents theoretical challenges to the assumptions underpinning these forms of educational intervention.

"Using" Experience for Learning? Critiques of Experiential Learning in Adult Education

Critical challenges to experiential learning have employed a rich variety of arguments to question its educational conceptualization. These are presented here not to negate the previous sections of theory and suggestions for educators, but to encourage more thoughtfulness in their adoption. Some of the critiques open insights about the repressive potential of harnessing experiential learning for educative purposes. Some raise concerns about inserting an educator into adults' processes of learning from experience. Many ask difficult questions about the meaning and relationship of experience and reflection, wondering whether certain models of experiential learning are too simplistic. If engaged with an open mind, these critiques encourage us as educators to become more "integrative, permeable, discriminating, and inclusive" (Mezirow 1991, p. 225) about our understandings of experiential learning and our role in it.

In the following paragraphs, critiques of experiential learning are grouped into five areas:

1. Challenges to the primacy placed on "reflection" as a cognitive activity and the limitations of this focus
2. Challenges to the view of experience as something concrete to be reflected upon
3. Challenges to the lack of robust consideration of interplay between people and "context"
4. Challenges to the notion of "learner" as a unitary self who can reflect unproblematically
5. Challenges to educators' intervention as "managers" of others' experiential learning

Challenges to Understanding Reflection as a Cognitive Activity

Critics such as Britzman (1998a) and Sawada (1991) maintain that the focus of experiential learning theory on cognitive reflection is somewhat simplistic and reductionist. First, this focus justifies and emphasizes rational control and mastery, which feminist theorists of workplace learning have criticized as a eurocentric, masculinist view of knowledge creation (Hart 1992; Michelson 1996). Second, this reflective constructivist view does not provide any sophisticated understandings of the role of desire in experience and learning, despite its central tenet that a learner's intention guides the inquiry process. Desire is a foundational principle in human experience and knowledge, according to psychoanalytic theories of experience and learning. Third, the focus on rational concept-formation through cognitive reflection sidesteps what Britzman (1998a) calls the ambivalences and internal "vicissitudes" bubbling in the unconscious. According to Britzman, they direct our interpretations and therefore our meaning making of experience in unpredictable ways. (This view is more fully developed in chapter 3.)

Britzman also argues that the emphasis on conscious reflection ignores or makes invisible those psychic events that are not available to the conscious mind, including the desires and position of the reflecting "I" respective to the reflected-upon "me" being constructed as a container of knowledge. Meanwhile, constructivism does not attend to internal resistance in the learning process, the active "ignore-ances" that Ellsworth (1997) contends are as important in shaping our engagement in experience as attraction to particular objects of knowledge. The view that experience must be processed through reflection clings to binaries drawn between complex blends of doing/learning, implicit/explicit, active/passive, life experience/instructional experience, reflection/action (most notably in Kolb's depiction of perceiving and processing activities conceived as continua from concrete to abstract engagement).

Sawada (1991) argues that understanding reflection as "processing" reinforces a conduit understanding of learning, relying on an old input-output metaphor of learning in which the system becomes input to itself. Furthermore, constructivism falsely presumes a "cut" universe, in which subjects are divided from the environment and from their own experiences and reflection is posited as the great integrator, bridging separations that it creates, instead of reorienting us to the *whole*.

Challenges to the Representation of Context

A second area of challenge to reflective constructivism is its separation of the individual doing the learning and the individual's context. Context involves the social relations and political-cultural dimensions of the community in which the individual is caught up, the nature of the task, the web of joint actions in which the individual's choices and behaviors are enmeshed, the vocabulary and cultural beliefs through which the individual makes meaning of the whole situation, and the historical, temporal, and spatial location of the situation. Obviously, these dimensions are crucial to understand how learning unfolds in experience.

In Kolb's model of experiential learning, context is given little consideration. "Experience" and "reflection on experience" are portrayed as if this "learning" exists in what Jarvis (1987) called "splendid isolation." Jarvis suggests that context is constituted partly by the different ways a person interacts with it. He proposes an altered model of experiential learning portraying a person, shaped by a particular sociocultural milieu, moving into and out of various social situations. The person's response might be *reflective learning* (contemplation, problem solving, or active experimentation), or it might be *nonreflective learning* (absorbing information, unconsciously internalizing new understandings, or mechanically practicing new skills). A response might even be *nonlearning* (rejecting learning, too preoccupied to learn, or just interacting mechanically).

Mezirow's theory of transformative learning has been criticized for proposing "a concept of rationality that is essentially ahistorical and decontextualized" (Clark and Wilson 1991, p. 90). Although his later revisions of his theory recognized learning as situated in a social context, Mezirow, according to Taylor (1998), failed to maintain the connection between the construction of knowledge and the context within which it is interpreted.

Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1996) presented context as a significant dimension of experience, with learners reflecting before, during, and after their immersion in events in this context. The context presents possibilities from which learners presumably select objects of knowing with which to interact. However, context here is portrayed problematically as a static space separate from the individual. The learner is still viewed as fundamentally autonomous from his or her surroundings. The learner moves through context, is "in" it and affected by it, but the learner's meanings still exist in the learner's head and move with the learner from one context to the next. Knowledge is taken to be a substance, a third thing created from the learner's interaction with other actors and objects and bounded in the learner's head. Social relations of power exercised through language or cultural practices are not theorized as part of knowledge construction.

This is a fundamental distinction between constructivism and other views of experiential learning outlined in chapter 3. Situative theorists,[3] for example, criticize the constructivist separation of person from context, as if "context" is a container in which the learner moves, rather than a web of activity, subjectivities, and language. When context is viewed as this web, elements of experience such as "learner," "event," "action," "object," and "setting" do not appear to be so distinct as the reflective view portrays them. Michelson (1996, 1999) suggests alternative understandings of experience that destablize unitary identity and social categories, recognize the interplay between body and world, and challenge binaries such as person/context and reflection/action in experiential learning.

Challenges to Understanding Experience as Concrete

Many have critiqued Kolb's assumption that experience is "concrete" and split from "reflection" as a sort of dichotomy. With the proliferation of postmodern understandings of the relationship between person, context/culture, and experience (e.g., see Usher, Bryant, and Johnson 1997), it has become commonplace to assume the discursive production and fluidity of experience. As Michelson (1999) has argued, experience exceeds rational attempts to bound, control, and rationalize it according to preexisting social categories and sanctioned uses. From a feminist perspective, Michelson (1996) observes that emphasis on (critical) reflection depersonalizes the learner as an autonomous, rational knowledge-making self, disembodied, rising above the dynamics and contingency of experience. The learning process of reflection presumes that knowledge is extracted and abstracted from experience by the processing mind. This ignores the possibility that all knowledge is constructed within power-laden social processes, that experience and knowledge are *mutually determined*, and that experience itself is knowledge driven and cannot be known outside socially available meanings. Further, argues Michelson (1996), the reflective or constructivist view of development denigrates bodily and intuitive experience, advocating retreat into the loftier domains of rational thought from which "raw" experience can be disciplined and controlled. In her later work she draws attention to experience that is "outrageous and transgressive, experience not easily reduced to reason and coherence" (Michelson 1999, p. 145). She suggests that reflective theories of

[3]See for example the works of Greeno (1997), Gold and Watson (1999), Lave and Wenger (1991), and Wilson and Myers (1999), which are discussed in further detail in chapter 3.

experiential learning dominating adult education have actually repressed possibilities of meaning, knowledge, and identity. Working from the ideas of Bakhtin (1981), she suggests that the notion of "carnival" might help open our theories of experiential learning. Carnival is "a site for transgressing repressive, overdetermined meanings and creating knowledge within a wider play of possibilities ... where we can welcome the excess of experience and with it, the contingent quality of both meaning and identity" (pp. 145-146).

Her critique of educators is aligned with other feminist poststructuralists such as Orner (1992) and Tisdell (1998), who argue that the assumption of (distorted) "concrete experience" leads to a mistaken educational orientation of freeing people from their misconceptions, ideologies, false consciousness, and colonized lifeworlds. Instead, argues Michelson (1999), educators should be assisting learners in exploring the availability of meanings *within* our cultures and societies. We cannot deny people's historically embedded subjectivity or the boundaries of self. Instead, we should be committed to opening self "to the transgressive, oppositional Other within our own discourses and societies" (p. 146). These ideas are developed in chapter 3.

Challenges to Understanding a Learner as a Unitary Self

The constructivist view considers the individual a primary actor in the process of knowledge construction, and understanding as largely a conscious, rational process. Clark and Dirkx (2000) show that in this dominant humanist view, the learner is assumed to be a stable, unitary self that is regulated through its own intellectual activity. Access to experience through rational reflection is also assumed, as is the learner's capacity, motivation, and power to mobilize the reflective process. As discussed in more detail in chapter 3, this view of the learning self is challenged by psychoanalytic, situative, and enactivist perspectives. Suffice to state again here that poststructural, feminist, postmodern, and other views argue that self is multiple and shifts according to context. "Self," argue some poststructural writers in terms of discursive reality, is an illusory image.[4] In fact, we are "subjects" brought into presence through discourses. What we construe as our unitary (or authentic) self having "experience" are stories we tell in particular contexts for particular purposes, which can be reshaped by infinite configurations and voices. Others argue in terms of the fluidity and interdependence of material reality (us in our worlds): the boundaries between self and nonself are actually more permeable and the flow between them far more continuous than we might be prepared to accept.

[4]Usher, Bryant, and Johnson (1997) describe this as a postmodern, "decentered" view of the self: "Subjectivity without a centre or origin, caught in meanings, positioned in language and the narratives of culture. The self cannot know itself independently of the significations in which it is enmeshed. There is no self-present subjectivity, hence no transcendental meaning of the self. Meanings are always 'in play' and the self, caught up in this play, is an ever-changing self" (p. 103). Michel Foucault (1980) even suggests that our society has tried to invent the illusion of a self through technologies such as counseling, journal-writing, and autobiography. Orner (1992) explains that the switch from conceptions of "self" to "subjects" encourages us to "think of ourselves and our realities as constructions; the products of meaning-making activity which are both culturally specific and generally unconscious. The term 'subject' calls into question the notion of a totally conscious self" (p. 79).

Michelson (1999) shows the evolution of this concept of a unitary self beginning in the Enlightenment view of an interiorized subjectivity, in which body became the ground for an individual autonomy (separate from Other) and inner experience became privatized. In this movement toward privileging self came freedom and agency, along with the internalization of social control. As Kolb (1984) maintained, the modern discovery of a private inner realm of experience granted to individuals their worth, dignity, and liberty to make choices. However, the management of inner experience became important to ensure discipline and regulation of these choices as a bourgeois society arose. Michelson goes on to show how mainstream theories of experiential learning that arose gradually became tied to social relations of capitalism. As discussed in the following section, this movement to "manage" experiential learning poses grave concern for adult educators.

Challenges to Educators' "Management" of Experiential Learning

Ironically, experiential learning's focus originated in political attempts to resist the authority and hegemony of academic and scientific knowledge and to honor people's own unique experience. Also, as Michelson and Kolb both point out, experiential learning was politically focused on celebrating through acknowledging the importance of inner experience, human dignity, and freedom to choose. However, several writers have challenged mainstream experiential learning as becoming focused on managing this domain.

From her own long experience working with APL (assessment of prior learning) programs in the United Kingdom, Fraser (1995) explains the unfolding history of this approach. The objective of programs such as Making Experience Count (MEC) was to legitimize prior learning within vocational and nonvocational certificating bodies toward awarding National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) and granting access to or standing in higher education. MEC also intended to facilitate understanding and thence ownership of the learning process, to enhance self-esteem and confidence in a process designed to be "andragogical" in the humanistic tradition of Malcolm Knowles. The original MEC walked a careful line between the demands for accredited outcomes to their courses—and perhaps a reductionist educational framework—and a philosophy of empowering students, upholding their own life experience, and making it count.

However, Fraser argues that, although originally designed to value diverse individual experience, formal and informal, APL has become restrictive about what counts as experience. Much of the potential for valuing individual experience and finding creative outlets for its expression is being eroded as market forces hold sway over issues of vocational and educational relevance. Fraser describes this as a disjuncture between public discourse and private experience, producing a fundamental paradox when the private journey of discovery and learning is brought under public scrutiny and adjudication. The underlying assumption is that a coherent unified self exists who is a narrator, who can recollect experience and turn it into learning. Experience is assumed to be coherent, consistent, and a site for rational intellectual excavation. The process compels adults to construct a self to fit the APL dimensions and celebrates individualistic achievement: adults are what they have done. This orientation does not address social inequities or the issue of different and often painful lessons learned from experiences related to our subjec-

tivity as members of different cultural, economic, gendered environments. The "disadvantaged," claims Fraser, often experience great barriers to opportunity and fulfillment; it is unfair to measure them by "what they have done" according to institutional categories of valued and recognizable knowledge. One important area of inequity relates to the gendered nature of standards for assessing adult experience. In one example she describes how, at the School for Independent Study in London, student autobiographies were adjudicated. Fewer than 60% of women's autobiographies "passed" compared to 80% of men's. Fraser claims this was because men's life patterns—as self-chosen events pursuing rational goals—were more aligned to institutional ideas. Women's life stories were parts of others' lives, with diffuse voices and shifting identities.

Experiential learning cannot be discussed apart from its political, social, and cultural contexts. Like Fraser, Michelson (1996) shows how the interests, authority, and understandings of knowledge pervading higher education institutions distort people's experience in the process of assessing it, dividing experience into visible/invisible categories, creating identities, and generally colonizing people's experience by squeezing them into preset categories. Michelson (1999) claims that "the management of experience has become a way of regulating how people define themselves and construct an identity" (p. 144).

Critical analysts of learning initiatives in workplace contexts have pointed out that, in an environment where "production is, above all, production for profit; that nature is dead, malleable matter entirely at our disposal" (Hart 1992, p. 26), workers' experiential learning is often viewed as "human capital" with great potential economic benefits for the organization. Usher and Solomon (1998) write:

> The educational discourse of experiential learning intersects happily with the managerial discourse of workplace reform ... since both shape subjectivity in ways appropriate to the needs of the contemporary workplace. (p. 8)

This shaping of the continuous (experiential) learner is perhaps the most troubling of all criticisms of the discourse of experiential learning in adult education. In the reflective/constructivist orientation, subjectivities that are potentially multiple, shifting, transgressive, and spontaneous are recast as coherent, stable, rational, and self-regulating. Their experience is raw capital to be processed into knowledge. Tennant (1999) has shown how the educational issue of "transfer," when brought to learning in human experience, implies an excavation of fluid experience to capture knowledge, generalize it, and apply it in different contexts. In this process, living human experience becomes normalized, standardized, then commodified and sold in the labor exchange relations defining capitalism.

In this configuration of human experience, organizations' fight to remain competitive in a global market of overproduction, underemployment, and impossible pace of technological change (Garrick and Usher 1999) can be transformed into a learning problem that is devolved onto individuals. Their "responsibility" is continuous (experiential) learning, which educators and managers assess according to knowledge claims recognized in their

own particular sociocultural milieu. As Edwards (1998a) argues, reflection, though differentiated, becomes a basic pedagogic stance for all workers, because nonroutine tasks are part of everyone's everyday work activity, not just professionals:

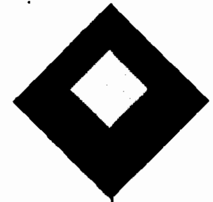
> A more intense working environment may require the reflective practice of workers being able to respond "on their feet" ... Here self-management within organization frameworks displaces the forms of autonomous activity which are often associated with professional work. In this sense, reflective practice may be well part of the "moral technology" and forms of governmentality through which work is intensified and regulated ... Engaging in reflective practice, bringing together thought and action, reflecting whilst you are doing, are key conditions of flexibility .... The reflective practitioner signifies the worker in reflexive modernization par excellence. (p. 387)

Conclusion

In sum, this chapter reviews the explanatory concepts and applications to practice of one particular orientation to experiential learning that has sustained a prominent position in the field of adult education: the constructivist perspective, called reflection in this monograph. The discussion shows how this perspective essentially privileges individual human consciousness constructing knowledge by engaging in a cognitive process of reflection upon episodes of lived experience. Influential theorists within this general orientation each emphasize different elements of this process: Kolb, Boud, Schön, Mezirow, and Brookfield. Some, such as Vygotsky, lay foundations for more sociocultural and psychoanalytic perspectives. Implications for practice based on this reflective/constructivist orientation are presented in terms of four roles for educators: facilitator, instigator, coach, and assessor of people's experience. Finally, this discussion gives examples of critical challenges to certain models within this reflective orientation, particularly critiquing the focus on reflection as a mental activity; the separation of cognition and situated, embodied experience; the failure to acknowledge the discursive production of experience; the representation of learner as a unitary self; and the managing role educators sometimes enact.

In chapter 3, alternate perspectives of experiential learning that in part attempt to address these and other conceptual problems are presented.

Beyond Reflection: Alternate Conceptions of Experiential Learning



The *reflection* or *constructivist* view of experiential learning dominating adult education has drawn attention to the importance of reflection and the need to adjust pedagogy to acknowledge the importance of multidimensional experience. But the critical challenges cited in the previous chapter show that overly deterministic understandings of human perceptions of experience, overly cognitive understandings of relations between experience and knowledge, and overly managerial interventions of educators in people's learning from experience limit our theorizing and threaten to repress both experiencing and learning processes. As Michelson (1999) continues to remind us, "experience exceeds rational attempts to bound it, control, and rationalize it according to preexisting social categories and sanctioned uses" (p. 151).

In this chapter, four alternate conceptions of experiential learning are introduced. These represent distinct currents of thought that have emerged in recent scholarly writing addressing (experiential) learning and cognition. These were selected for discussion here either because of their prominence in recent writing about learning and development or because they offer an original perspective on the relationships among experience, context, mind, and learning that may raise helpful questions about the dominant constructivist view. The four currents of thought selected have been given descriptive titles for purposes of reference in this paper, which should not be understood as formally designated theory names. These titles are *interference* (a psycho-analytic perspective rooted in Freudian tradition), *participation* (from perspectives of situated cognition), *resistance* (a critical cultural perspective), and *co-emergence* (from the enactivist perspective emanating from neuroscience and evolutionary theory). These four perspectives are each described briefly in the sections that follow, outlining their view of knowledge, learning, and teaching; their understanding of relations among knower, culture, and knowledge; implications for educational practice; and critiques and questions raised by other perspectives.

The rationale for these categories relates to the educational purposes and audience of this typology. Psychoanalytic theory is enjoying an energetic renaissance in current theories of teaching and learning, which as yet have not become prominent in adult education. In contrast, many perspectives in critical cultural theory have enjoyed widespread interest, attention, and dissemination in adult education literature. Greater service may be provided at this point by showing similar broad patterns among these perspectives than contributing further to the voluminous scholarly literature delineating their subtleties and respective utility. Meanwhile, the enactivist theory of learning, although certainly not new, has only recently been incorporated in theorizing about pedagogy in North America.[1] Newcomers to enactivist theory may automatically associ-

[1]Enactivism has evolved from complexity, ecological, and cybernetics theories appearing in writings by Bateson (1979), Lovelock (1979), and others. Educational writers such as Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kepler (2000), Doll (1993), and Prigogine (1997) have taken up enactivist/complexity explanations of cognition in the past decade.

ate it with situated cognitive theory, when in fact there are important distinctions. Therefore, each has been assigned to a separate category.

Each perspective raises issues about the others' approaches to explaining learning in experience, issues about the relationships between knower and context, between learning and action, between mind and learning, and between educator and the process of learning. Perhaps the most important question to put to any one perspective on (experiential) learning is, How is the one doing the experiencing being understood? Too easily we fall into the trap of assuming our own (*Educators'*) rightful presence in the experience of others and the subsequent trap of transforming those others into *Learners*. The four perspectives presented here help call these and other binary distinctions into question.

Interference: A Psychoanalytic Perspective

Psychoanalytic theory has been taken up by educational theorists to help disrupt notions of progressive development, certainty of knowledge, and the centered individual "learner." Psychoanalytic theory also helps open ways of approaching the realm of the unconscious, our resistance to knowledge, the desire for closure and mastery that sometimes governs the educational impulse, and enigmatic tensions among learner, knowledge, and educator. The field of psychoanalytic theory is broad. In contemporary educational writing, analyses draw upon both Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung and what Donald (1991) calls "feminist re-reading of Lacan's rereading of Freud" (p. 2). Curriculum theorists Pinar (1992) and Grumet (1992) both worked from psychoanalytic theories to invite interest in autobiography as a space of writing within which learning's conflicts between personal myths from outside and personal fictions from inside could be engaged. West (1996, 2000), an adult educator, has incorporated aspects of psychoanalytic concepts into his own "cultural psychology" theory of learning and autobiography. All of these movements contribute to what Pitt, Robertson, and Todd (1998) call an "explosion of psychoanalytic consideration of matters curricular and pedagogical" (p. 6).

Themes among Psychoanalytic Conceptions of Experiential Learning

One of the more prominent themes identified by Pitt, Robertson, and Todd is the individual's relations between the outside world of culture and objects of knowledge, and the inside world of psychic energies and dilemmas of relating to these objects of knowledge. Object relations theory, as Klein (1988) has explained, shows how the ego negotiates its boundaries with these objects.[2]

[2]According to object relations theory, once the ego perceives an object as distinct from itself, it decides whether to desire the object as "good" or reject it as "bad." As Gilbert (1998) explains, "perception is thus an ego function that responds both to the demands of unconscious desire and to the external demands of reality" (p. 31). The next decision is whether to ingest the "good" object or not. Knowledge perceived as "good" is still threatening, for once it is taken *in* to the ego it has the potential to transform the ego—an event against which the ego tries to protect itself. The ego also risks destroying the good object of knowledge through the act of incorporating it and losing the boundaries that separate itself from the knowledge.

The "inside world" is configured by knowledge dilemmas. These unfold through struggles between the unconscious and the conscious mind, which is aware of unconscious rumblings but can neither access them fully nor understand their language. Britzman (1998b) describes the unconscious as an "impossible concept" that cannot be educated: "knows no time, knows no negation, knows no contradiction ... We do not address the unconscious, it addresses us. But its grammar is strange and dreamy; it resists its own unveiling" (p. 55). The conscious mind, on the other hand, is both ignorant and partially aware of its own ignorance. The consciousness is thus anxious about its own uncertain impartial knowledge, its ability to know, and its fragile boundaries and existence. This anxiety often generates resistance to learning. The resulting negation or repression of certain knowledges holds particular interest for psychoanalytic learning theorists.[3]

Learning is also considered to be enmeshed with complex issues of desire. Introducing a volume exploring this area, Todd (1997) asks, How do we understand and engage desire? How are conflicting desires at the heart of the pedagogic encounter? Desire is not a straightforward lack of something compelling us to seek it, but can be understood in multiple ways. First, desire may be both learned and implicated in the learning process. We may not have any desire to know something about a particular field of study until, perhaps, we become involved in a project where we begin to experience that field. As we learn a little, at the edges so to speak, we may begin to develop or *learn* a desire to learn more. The general question is, How did we learn to desire the knowledge that we currently pursue in our learning endeavors?

Second, the location and direction of desire is more complex than traditional psychological notions of innate "human needs" imply. Briton (1997) suggests that the object of our desire (for knowledge) both attracts and repels us and is sometimes situated at the very heart of ourselves. As well, our object of desire is often uncannily transformed into something we hate. For example, we may feel compelled to know something that, when we finally understand it fully, is too horrible to contemplate—or perhaps so mundane that we disdain it.

Third, as Todd (1997) observes, "There are conflicting desires at the heart of the pedagogical encounter itself between what is said (what we say we want) and how we say it (the affective and psychic investments embedded therein; what is left unsaid)" (p. 7). So with respect to understanding experiential learning, psychoanalytic theorists ask, What are these dynamics of longing? How do desires configure limits as well as possibilities for individuals' participation in new knowledge?

Instead of the "unconscious," Michelson (1999) prefers to talk about sites of transgression, where experience exceeds the boundaries of sociocultural norms and language: "the

[3]Freud argued that intolerable ideas are permitted into the consciousness only as our denial that the idea is true. In this denial we attempt to intellectualize the idea, to separate our ego's emotional involvement with (and therefore possible subjection to) the idea, even while we are actively "hating" the idea. In these tensions between intellection and affection, learning occurs as a movement through the dilemma to accepting the knowledge. The dynamic of pedagogy within this movement is problematic. Should education induce these tensions and somehow midwife the movement to a learner's acknowledgment and insight? How much anxiety can an individual stand? How can learning proceed if its very conditions of anxiety stimulate the resistance that forestalls learning?

surfeit of experience after all authorized meanings have been exhausted, the excess that enables and contests every performance and affirms the unruly intractable element in experience" (p. 149). The point is that understandings of experiential learning as a process of conscious reflection on lived experience ignores what Ellsworth (1997) describes as "chasms opened up by lived experience that map onto no known or authorized concepts, words, or arguments" (p. 188). Psychoanalytic learning theory attempts to map certain complex dimensions of this experience in which personal transformation can occur.

Jacques Lacan: Understanding the Person Doing the Experiencing

The ideas of Lacan (1978) related to this mapping of experience have become highly influential in learning theory. Lacan proposed three registers in which our psychic world meets the external world. The *Imaginary* is a preverbal register of ideals using a visual logic, springing from a childhood understanding of itself as a mirror image, undifferentiated from, and desiring to complete its mother. The *Symbolic* register is the language and laws of culture, of which the child becomes part. Here the individual experiences conflicts between the limits of legitimate vocabulary in the Symbolic register, with the desires and images experienced in the Imaginary register. The *Real* register is a central sense of lack that drives the individual but cannot be understood by the conscious mind. Zizek (1991) explains that we cover this Real lack of ours, encountering it only in traumatic dreams in which "our common everyday reality, the reality of the social universe in which we assume our roles of kind-hearted, decent people, turns out to be an illusion that rests on certain 'repression', on overlooking the [R]eal of our desire. This social reality is then nothing but a fragile, symbolic cobweb that can at any moment be torn aside by an intrusion of the [R]eal" (p. 17). Although we may not consciously understand this desire, we sense its presence and so project it onto things that we desperately seek, believing that in attaining them we can satisfy this central lack.

Bracher (1993) explains that our subjectivity or self is, in essence, these projections of desire to have some other things or be some other things or to have others possess us or desire us. Through the process of becoming social and appropriating our culture's language, we learned to represent or adapt some of these projections in particular language. We also learned which of these desires are allowed or forbidden by our culture. In terms of experiential learning, Lacanian theory portrays human individuals at a psychic level as essentially suffering—amidst contradictory desires, repressed desires, and terror at confronting the Real desire that we sense is lurking beneath our safe constructions of reality and our "selves."

For experiential learning, one other important idea that educational theorists have borrowed from Lacan is an understanding of the person doing the experiencing as a "split" subject. There is no entity existing as a unified self, as ego psychology would have it. Instead, the subject's identity is split between conscious and unconscious desires that are continually misrecognized. The subject is also split by imaginary illusions sustained in the language or Symbolic register. Lacan proposes that our split subjectivity is evident when we try to think or talk about ("enunciate") our experiences. The "I" *(je)* doing the

enunciating is different and distanced from the "me" *(moi)*, the object of the talk, the image of a "person" whose actions-amidst-experience we construct from a distance, borrowing from various images and vocabulary available in our cultures. The identity of the "I" subject is empty; it has no material existence. The I can't talk about itself at the same time as it experiences itself. It is pure drive, seeking identity to fulfill its own lack of a sense of "real" identity. Silverman (1992) explains: "It is only in the guise of the moi that the subject takes on a corporeal form, and consequently lays claim to a visual image, and it is only as a refraction of the moi that it is able to desire an object. Identity and desire are so complexly imbricated that neither can be explained without recourse to the other" (p. 6).

Deborah Britzman: Strategies of Crafting the Self

Britzman's (1998a) theory of pedagogy follows psychoanalytic ideas of split subjectivity, the centrality of desire, and the significance of the unconscious and its resistance to knowledge in the learning process. Britzman views learning as *interference* of conscious thought by the unconscious, and the "uncanny" psychic conflicts that result. Our desires and resistance for different objects, which we experience as matters of love and hate, attach our internal world to the external social world. Our daily, disturbing inside-outside encounters are carried on at subtle levels and we draw upon many strategies to ignore them. But when we truly attend these encounters we enter the profound conflicts that are learning.[4] The general learning process is "crafting the self through everyday strategies" of coping with and coming to understand what is suggested in these conflicts.

Although the unconscious cannot be known directly, its workings interfere with our intentions and our conscious perception of direct experience. These workings constantly "bother" the ego, producing breaches between acts, thoughts, wishes, and responsibility.[5] Despite the ego's varied and creative defenses against confronting these breaches, the conscious mind is forced to notice random paradoxes and contradictions of experience and uncanny slips into sudden awareness of difficult truths about the self. These truths are what Britzman (1998a) call "lost subjects," those parts of our selves that we resist, then try to reclaim and want to explore, but are afraid to. True knowledge of these lost subjects jeopardizes the ego's conscious sense of itself, its loves, and its knowledge. However, for the self to be more than a prisoner of its own narcissism, it must bother itself, notice the breaches between acts, thoughts, dreams, waking, wishes, and responsibility. We learn by *working through* the conflicts of all these psychic events. Experiential learning is thus coming to tolerate one's own conflicting desires, while recovering the selves that are repressed from our terror of full self-knowledge.

[4]Britzman calls these survival strategies the "arts of getting by," and claims they are prevalent in education. Curriculum mostly resists these complex subtle encounters constantly playing beneath classroom talk and the press of "covering" content, and both students and teachers have learned to ignore them.

[5]One question concerning psychoanalytic theorists is, How does the unconscious interfere with conscious thought to produce knowledge? And what knowledge do we resist? Other issues that concern learning, from the psychoanalytic perspective, are the location and direction of desire, including the desire for specific knowledge and its (often) misfit with the thing to be learned, and the discontinuities and uncanny conflicts in experience.

Implications for Adult Educators Suggested by the Psychoanalytic Orientation

The role of the educator from the psychoanalytic view is a problem because its impulse is to "solve the problem" of these conflicts. But these conflicts are not knowledge deficits or insufficiently developed meaning perspectives to be liberated through conscious critical reflection or an educator's intervention. Britzman (1998a) deplores education's urgent compulsion to "emancipate" and "produce" learners' change. She argues that such pedagogy often represses psychic conflict in its intolerance of complex individual learning processes of "working-through." Instead, Britzman (1998a) claims, education should help people come to know and value their self's dilemmas as elegant problems and allow space and time for workings-through. The conditions and dynamics for the slow, difficult, and interminable work of learning itself are what should be at stake, not content or particular versions of cognitive change.

As Britzman (1998a) emphasizes, the teacher is most definitely *not* a psychoanalyst, nor is the classroom the environment for psychoanalysis. However, educators must examine the traces of their own unconscious desires—desires for certainty, for students' love, for authority—in their actions and responses to events. Britzman suggests that we also examine those sites of our own resistance to knowing, the dark shadows of our fears and guilt within our practice interacting with learners. By examining our own educational biographies, claims Britzman, educators can seek revealing contradictions, ambiguities, and love-hate conflicts in our learning and practice. When educators come to know their own self-conflicts and how these are manifest in their pedagogy, they learn to tolerate difficult knowledge and the difficult workings-through that students experience in coming to confront their own conflicts. In other words, to be effective helping students work through their psychic dilemmas, we need to learn to listen to our own unconscious.

Moving away from introspection to classroom practice, Ellsworth (1997) suggests that *how* the teacher speaks and listens is more important than *what* the teacher says. Her suggestion is for educators to respect and listen carefully to what emerges in responses to texts and events of both learners and educators, to understand what is occurring at the level of the unconscious in educational interactions. Bracher (1993) shows that learning one's own (both teacher's and student's) largely unconscious desires and resistance can be encouraged through interpreting a text in many different ways. The first step is finding a text sufficiently powerful to engage learners' energy and emotions. Then, educators assist learners in attending to and sharing their own responses and mapping the resulting "identities" that the text produces in themselves as subjects. Learners are encouraged to listen to where their response is ambiguous, paradoxical, or resistant—in other words, where they find themselves refusing understanding. Then through subsequent dialogue, the educator can help draw forth these responses to bring unconscious fantasies and fears to voice. Often these challenge culturally approved symbols, images, and identities. Educators, writes Bracher (1993), can help people to examine and perhaps find expression for those alternate desires that may lead to new productive identities and action alternatives.

Thus, educative conditions would promote *interference*, botherings of the conscious mind, interruptions of the sense of truth, and ultimately anxiety. Felman (1987) argues that education's dream of "absolute completion" of knowledge in a fully conscious knower is impossible, for the unconscious "is a kind of unmeant knowledge that escapes intentionality and meaning, a knowledge spoken by the language of the subject, but that the subject cannot recognize, assume as his, appropriate" (p. 77). In fact, Felman points out that the powerful dynamic between learner and educator in which the learning conflicts unfold is formed between the relation of one unconscious to another and is unknowable to both. To learn, people need to be deliberate experimenters in their own learning, willingly engaging in traumas of the self. An obvious issue that educators need to attend to with such approaches is the prohibition of such dialogue sustained through power relationships and authority structures operating in a group or classroom. Invasion of private spaces, associations of the confessional, presumptions to control through knowing subjects, issues of transference, and multiple inequities make the classroom a charged political space where psychoanalytic workings-through must be broached with exceeding caution.

Critique from Other Perspectives

Despite their pervasive influence in educational theorizing, psychoanalytic theories have not gone unchallenged. Some question the assumption that the "conscious" and "unconscious" are split, suggesting that this sort of binary sets up oppositions that psychoanalytic theory tries to avoid. Vandenberg (1999) questions the definition of consciousness used by Ellsworth, claiming that, because perceptual and conceptual consciousness can function independently (such as when driving a car while talking), there is no need to propose an "unconscious."

From a rational constructivist perspective, Mezirow (1990) acknowledges the perturbations of the unconscious, usually inaccessible to the reflective conscious mind, which often catalyze transformative learning. However, he asserts the primacy of reason and the need to control and subvert through critical reflection and communicative dialogue those "dysfunctional" habits of mind leading to undesirable actions. As rational beings we can overcome our logical contradictions, unjustified or inarticulable beliefs (Mezirow 1996) that psychoanalytic theory asserts must be simply accepted as interminable dilemmas. In other words, learning is more than just a process of working-through, it is working *toward* idealized mental frames of reference and beliefs that can be validated.

Situative perspectives, described in the next section, might argue that psychoanalytic theory dwells too strongly on the internal, with insufficient attention paid to the systems that bind the changing human mind and its psychic traumas to its changing contexts. Lave (1988) points out that context is frequently undertheorized as some kind of container into which individuals are dropped. The context may be acknowledged to affect the person but the person is still viewed as an autonomous agent of knowing with his or her own psychic systems, which are still viewed as fundamentally distinct from other contextual systems. Further, the psychoanalytic view seems to assume that learning can take place entirely as a mental process, regardless of patterns of participation in continu-

ously evolving communities. Psychoanalytic views may mistake learning and doing, individuals and the symbolic tools and communities of their activities, as separable processes.

Saltman (1999), taking a critical cultural perspective, is concerned that so much emphasis on the personal diverts attention from the political, the crucial power dynamics of material culture in which people need to learn to act effectively. Saltman criticizes Ellsworth, for example, for focusing on continuous rereadings of the textuality of daily life and the micro-structures of the psyche. These emphases ignore the fact that micro-structures are "historically contingent products of larger overdetermining social forces" (p. 10). Ultimately, says Saltman, psychoanalytic theory lays no ground for ethical or political standards in learning: all versions of the Holocaust would stand.

Most critical cultural views of learning, described in more detail later in this chapter, would take up this moral question with psychoanalytic learning theories: Are all workings-through to be honored and encouraged? How can we envision alternate possibilities if all knowledge floats according to an individual's own psychic disturbances? Agency is a contested issue in any learning theory, but perhaps particularly in psychoanalytic theory. Pushed to extreme in the direction to which it points, this perspective may leave people in interminable ambivalence. Some theorists mobilized by a critical cultural impulse would likely find it difficult to tolerate this position.

Participation: A Situative Perspective

An alternate view of learning is proposed by situative perspectives (e.g., Brown, Duguid, and Collins 1989; Greeno 1997; Lave and Wenger 1991; Rogoff 1990). "Situated cognition" maintains that learning is rooted in the situation in which a person participates, not in the head of that person as intellectual concepts produced by reflection, nor as inner energies produced by psychic conflicts. Knowing and learning are defined as engaging in changing processes of human activity in a particular community. Knowledge is not a substance to be ingested and then transferred to new situation, but part of the very process of *participation* in the immediate situation.

Themes among Situative Perspectives

Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that the understandings that emerge and help a person to participate in a situation are intimately entwined with the particular community, tools, and activity of that situation. In other words, individuals learn *as* they participate by interacting with the community (with its history, assumptions and cultural values, rules, and patterns of relationship), the tools at hand (including objects, technology, languages, and images), and the moment's activity (its purposes, norms, and practical challenges). Knowledge emerges from these elements interacting. Thus knowing is interminably inventive and entwined with doing (Lave 1988). The objective is to become a full participant in the community of practice, not to learn *about* the practice. The community itself defines what constitutes legitimate practice. Newcomers to a community of practice start

learning through "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave and Wenger 1991), that is, by working at the margins at first, observing, practicing a little, getting to know and interact with a few community members, and thus gradually becoming integrated into the networks of action.

Because knowledge flows in action it can be neither commodified as a conceptual substance, nor considered as centered in any way within individual subjects. Pile and Thrift (1995) argue that first, understanding is created within conduct itself, which flows ceaselessly, is adaptable but not often deliberately intentional, and is always future oriented. Second, understanding is worked out in joint action with others, through shared but not necessarily articulated understandings of "what is real, what is privilege, what is problem, and what is moral" (p. 24).[6] Thus the process of knowing is essentially corporeal, realized through action, and therefore often worked out in a domain beyond consciousness. This fundamentally challenges the belief that individual reflection and memory are significant in knowledge production.

"Transfer" of knowledge then becomes problematic. But as Wilson (1993) points out, adults don't learn *from* experience, they learn *in* it. "If we are to learn, we must become embedded in the culture in which the knowing and learning have meaning: conceptual frameworks cannot be meaningfully removed from their settings or practitioners" (p. 77). Each different context evokes different knowings through very different demands of participation. This means that training in a classroom only helps develop learners' ability to "do training" better, in the sense of generic skills of negotiating typical classroom activities. What is learned in one training or worksite is not portable, but is transformed and reinvented when applied to the tasks, interactions, and cultural dynamics of another. As Sfard (1998) explains, "the notion of 'knowledge transfer' implies carrying knowledge across contextual boundaries. But when neither knowledge nor context are viewed as clearly delineated areas, "there are no definite boundaries to be crossed" (p. 9).

Truth claims also become problematic in situative views. Here, knowledge is not judged by what is "true" and "false" or what is "erroneous," but by what is relevant in this particular situation, what is worth knowing and doing, what is convenient for whom, and what to do next (Lave and Chaiklin 1993). The emphasis is on improving one's ability to *participate meaningfully* in particular practices and moving to legitimate roles within communities. "Meaningful" must be negotiated between the individual's desires and intentions (including the desire to belong) and the community's changing requirements for certain forms of participation. Situated theorists focus their continuing inquiry on such questions as, What constitutes meaningful action for a particular individual in a

[6]Pile and Thrift are part of a current in cultural geography that is using metaphors of space, movement, maps, and time to analyze subjectivity and learning. Actor-network theory is one frame that has generated recent pedagogical interest. As described by writers like Law (1994) and Latour (1993), actor-network theory illuminates regional flows of action in terms of knowledge production. Knowledge is assumed to be constituted in social networks spread across space and time, and individuals develop as they move through these networks. Individuals experience the network's knowledge as they participate in its spatial and temporal arrangements. The space-time arrangements of a particular activity have physical and symbolic dimensions, representing to individuals what they are supposed to do in a space and how they should use their time (including notions of who or what is not supposed to be there).

given context? How is the development of knowledge constrained or created by the intersection of several existing practices in a particular space? (Lave and Wenger 1991).

Examining (Experiential) Workplace Learning through Situative Perspectives

In the context of the workplace, Gold and Watson (1999) of the Leeds Business School emphasize how a "valuational discourse" in a community of practice determines what is considered good and right and what counts as truth and reality in that community. This valuational discourse is most evident in the community's stories. These stories are value saturated, and they function as a "reflective infrastructure" to make sense of what is taking place. They not only provide a resource for everyday talk but, more important, also preserve the community from outside disturbances (which can be named as negative or as countering the community's best interests). Through dozens of direct and indirect exchanges with others throughout a single day, individuals adopt various positions and identities, adapt their behavior, choose new action, and contribute to the ongoing network of meanings and collective action. Gold and Watson explain the community's learning as developing new practices, through these networks, in highly improvisatory ways in response to a problem or difficulty. Thus the social relationships and talk are key to understanding experiential learning. An individual cannot be considered a separate "learner" in this configuration.

In contrast Beckett and Hager (2000), also explaining experiential learning within a workplace context, focus on the individual's practical judgments amidst the "hot action" of daily activity in a community of practice. These decisions are embedded in activity, so that deliberation over what to do next is based on what is contextually suitable. They draw attention to the idea of *flow* advanced by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and the role of attention in human learning (Winch 1998). That is, individuals attend to their total perceptions of their workplace: cognitive, affective, and social. These dimensions are inseparable, and are enmeshed in the individual's participation in the networks of social relations and joint action in the workplace community of practice. This participation, in terms of experiential learning, occurs through judgments that bring together human reasoning, will, and emotion.

Implications for Adult Educators Suggested by the Situative/Participative Orientation

The educator's role is not to develop individuals, but to help them participate meaningfully in the practices they choose to enter. Greeno (1997) characterizes this pedagogical goal as "improved participation" in an activity. People improve by becoming more attuned to constraints and affordances of different real situations. The educator may arrange authentic conditions and activities in which the learners practice interacting. When people learn to notice how specific properties and relations influence their possibilities for acting in one situation, they can more easily transform that activity in a wider range of situations (Greeno 1997). However, Greeno's portrayal of the "helping" educator contradicts certain premises of situated cognition, for the deliberate insertion of an

actor with particular intentions changes the purpose and flow of the activity. Educators cannot regard their own participation separately from the overall negotiation of the question, What constitutes meaningful participation in this community?

Others claim the pedagogical value of the situated perspective is to illuminate how different elements of a learning environment interact to produce particular actions and goals. Following this, Wilson and Myers (2000) propose these questions for educators: "Is the learning environment successful in accomplishing its learning goals? How do the various participants, tools and objects interact together? What meanings are constructed? How do the interactions and meanings help or hinder desired learning?" (p. 242). Sfard (1998) points out that the participation metaphor invokes themes of togetherness, solidarity, and collaboration that could promote more positive risk taking and inquiry in learning environments. Further, the situative perspective emphasizes being in constant flux, which avoids any permanent labeling of people:

> For the learner, all options are always open, even if he or she carries a history of failure. Thus quite unlike the [acquisition of knowledge] metaphor, the [participation metaphor] seems to bring a message of an everlasting hope: Today you act one way; tomorrow you may act differently. (Sfard 1998, p. 8)

Much research has explored the possibilities of designing environments that promote embodied, situative learning. The objective is to simulate "authentic" situations of practice containing rich, multifaceted problems that learners must identify and work through (Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt 1990). A variation of simulated environments is an approach called "cognitive apprenticeship" (Brandt, Farmer, and Buckmaster 1993). Here the educator models, then helps learners to approximate the activity being learned. The educator provides scaffolding to assist the learner before fading the assistance gradually to move the learner completely into self-directed learning and finally generalizing or transferring the skill.

Research on effective ways to assist situative learning in the workplace has also emphasized ways to arrange environmental and cultural conditions to optimize learning. Billett (1998), for example, describes "indirect" guidance as opportunities to observe and practice participation in a community, assignment to various tasks and increasing scope of responsibility, and time for reflection and dialogue. Billett notes that such conditions do not arise naturally or equitably for every worker. He argues that a key role for educators is to ensure equitable distribution of such opportunities and enhance their learning potential by ensuring adequate support resources and guidance and reasonable learning time.

Finally, Action Learning or Action Reflection Learning has become popular in workplace organizations as a way of integrating individuals' learning with tackling priority problems and dilemmas, under actual conditions, where history offers no solution. Based on writings of Reg Revans (1980),[7] Action Learning combines a situative perspective of experiential learning with tenets of critical reflection. That is, learning is assumed to be context

[7] A great deal of empirical research and practice have developed Revans' original ideas in various contexts. Interested readers may wish to consult ***Action Learning in Action*** by Marquardt (1999) for extensive description of Action Learning as an approach to experiential learning in contemporary organizations.

bound, with change-based data, purposes, and value choices, and dependent on the nature of people's participation. Through critical reflection, people are encouraged to bring underlying assumptions to consciousness and reframe those assumptions that don't accomplish desired goals. The educator's role is to help people identify problems and accept responsibility to take action on particular issues through a process of "unlearning and relearning" (Peters and Smith 1998). Colleagues support and challenge one another, but educators or facilitators are recommended to help guide and support the project, and mediate the group's work with the organization's goals, politics, resources, and philosophies (Adams and Dixon 1997).

Critique from Other Perspectives

Some constructivist learning theorists have argued that the situative claims are "misguided" and "overstated" in their insistence that knowledge is context dependent (Anderson, Reder, and Simon 1996, p. 5). These critics claim that the extent to which learning is tightly bound to context depends on the kind of knowledge being acquired, and the ways the material is engaged. "Transfer" is a legitimate construct: learners have proved they can master abstract knowledge in one context and apply these to a different context. The key is to help people develop transferable skills during initial learning events and to remind and help learners in unfamiliar situations to adapt and apply concepts with which they are already familiar. They claim that what is truly important in learning is "what cognitive processes a problem evokes, and not what real-world trappings it might have" (Anderson, Reder, and Simon 1996, p. 9).

Other critics have pointed out that not all learning in communities is laudable. Unsupervised people learning in "authentic environments" may make do, finding ways to participate that actually reinforce negative practices which a community is trying to eliminate. Salomon and Perkins (1998) argue that people who are apprenticed in particular ways may pick up undesirable forms of practice, wrong values, or strategies that subvert or profoundly limit the collective and its participating individuals.

A critical cultural perspective, described in the next section, may well challenge the apolitical position of situated cognition. Relations and practices related to dimensions of race, class, gender, and other cultural/personal complexities, apparently ignored by situative theorists, determine flows of power, which in turn determines different individuals' ability to participate meaningfully in particular practices of systems. There appears not to be, among situative perspectives, satisfactory responses to certain fundamental ethical questions of learning that are posed by other perspectives: Whose knowledge, among the various participants in the system, is afforded the greatest influence over the movements and directions of the system?

The situative perspective also has yet to address the question of positionality of actors within a system. As Ellsworth (1997) explains, "Each time we address someone, we take up a position within knowledge, power, and desire in relation to them, and assign to them a position in relation to ourselves and to a context" (p. 54). Power flows through the system according to the way these positions are connected, the way they address one

another, and the nature of the resulting space between the positions. The positions are in constant flux, for they change each time someone turns to a new activity or subject. In Lave and Wenger's work (1991), a learner's positionality within a system was conceptualized simplistically as a general movement from the "peripheral participation" to the center of a community. This notion would be viewed as problematic from critical cultural perspectives: it presumes the existence of an identifiable center and appears unconcerned with the governmentality of any system that accepts participation as hierarchical.

Situated perspectives also seem silent on the issue of resistance in communities where tools and activities may be unfair or dysfunctional. Is such resistance also considered meaningful participation? And does the appropriation of all energies as *participation*, including those intending to disrupt and fundamentally change the system, in fact dilute their disruptive effect and ensure the continuation of the system? The situated view may be understood to assume that encouraging participation in the existing community is a good thing, and thus provides few theoretical tools for judging what is deemed good in a particular situation or for changing a system's conventional flow of movement.

Resistance: A Critical Cultural Perspective

Critical cultural perspectives center power as a core issue in experience. The problem with some situated views and systems-theory perspectives is their lack of attention to inevitable power relations circulating in human cultural systems. Any system is a complex site of competing cultures. To understand human cognition, we must, from a critical cultural perspective, analyze the structures of dominance that express or govern the social relationships and competing forms of communication and cultural practices within that system. Writers in critical cultural pedagogy (Freire 1970; Giroux 1992; Giroux and McLaren 1994; Gore 1993; Lather 1991; Kellner 1995; McLaren 1989) claim that when these mechanisms of cultural power are named, ways and means to resist them appear. With resistance people can become open to unexpected, unimagined possibilities for work, life, and development. A purely applied systems view of cognition free of historical, political, cultural, and gender concerns makes some people vulnerable to those others intent on sustaining the discourses and practices that ensure their power.

As Foucault has shown, it is simplistic to conceive power as domination or as irrevocable forces that determine human activity. Critical cultural studies offer tools for tracing complex power relations and their consequences. The field is wide and certainly not monolithic, embracing pedagogical theorizing focused on gender issues, ideology and discourse analysis, media analysis, postcolonialism and subaltern studies, queer theory, race and identity, technoculture theory, and others. Obviously, many conflicting perspectives and emphases are involved. For the purpose of this brief section, little distinction will be made among these perspectives, although their heterogeneity should remain understood. Their writers all have in common their belief that politics are central to human cognition, activity, identity, and meaning. They often make explicit and demystify existing moment-to-moment interplays of power, and advocate social reconstruction by seeking more inclusive, generative, and integrative alternatives to certain oppressive cultural practices and discourses.

Themes among Critical Cultural Perspectives

Critical cultural perspectives suggest that learning in a particular cultural space is shaped by the *discourses and their semiotics* (the signs, codes, and texts) that are most visible and accorded most authority by different groups. These discourses often create dualistic categories such as man/woman, reflection/action, learning/doing, formal/informal, which determine unequal distribution of authority and resources. Such dualisms can result in labels that depersonalize human beings. They also legitimate certain institutions and exclude others, by representing "norms" and casting nonconformists as "other" in regard to these norms. Analysts such as Kellner (1995) show how such *representations* of people in cultural discourses contain, define, and control behavior and relations and generally limit the possibilities of people's identities. Young (1990) urges examination of the historical forces and mythologies that have shaped these discourses and representations, including the experiences and contributions of both "winners" and "losers," as these are defined by a discourse.

Some critical educational writers have used Bourdieu's (1980) theory of *cultural capital* to analyze certain mechanisms of control that are hidden or unrecognized and often complied with and exercised by the subjects of the control. Critical writers ask, What capital in this culture is accorded dominant status, and which group invests value in it? Desired cultural and symbolic capital has interest and meaning for particular groups, and requires particular cultural codes to understand and appreciate it. Knowledge itself and the categories that make it possible are capital invested with values. What is considered legitimate knowledge and how is it developed and exchanged? Which kinds and whose knowledge count most?

Borders and boundaries are significant for critical cultural writers in different ways than for theorists of other perspectives in which boundaries between inner and outer worlds (psychoanalytic) or between individual knower and objects of the environment (constructivist) are of most interest. Giroux (1992), for example, analyzes border thought to define cultural communities and territories, examining the identity options constructed for people within certain borders and the consequences for those who transgress. Chow (1993) examines blurrings of boundaries, discerning the tensions resulting from mixes and flows of cultures across multiple spaces. Edwards (1998b) is interested in the ways location and dislocation function in people's learning, as new spaces for alternative cultural practices and identities are being opened by "border crossings" in this globalized world, where boundaries between "real" and "virtual" cultures, individual and collective experiences, are increasingly blurred.

Postcolonialist writers claim that all of our histories and therefore our experiences and learning are entwined in some way with *colonization*. Education itself is a colonizing process. Colonization has depersonalized and dislocated colonial subjects, created new worlds from these oppressions (Spivak 1988), produced multiple patterns of dissent (violent, pacifist, and withdrawal) and created complex histories and dependencies between colonizers and resisters (Said 1993). Some writers suggest looking at the utopian traces that are inherent in any impulse to colonize others, which may provide clues to

possibilities beyond the domination. Bhabha (1994) suggests that new hybrid knowledges and spaces are developing from our collective histories of colonial dominance/resistance. Very new meanings and visions emerge as possibilities for new futures in these spaces—if they can be discerned by those locked in reasoning patterns of the past.

Social Action: Emancipatory Learning through Experience

Critical adult educator Griff Foley (1999) writes, "For me the most interesting and significant learning occurs informally and incidentally, in people's everyday lives. And some of the most powerful learning occurs as people struggle against oppression, as they struggle to make sense of what is happening to them and to work out ways of doing something about it" (pp. 1-2). His book is full of case studies around the world showing that people's personal experiences of social action—involved in actual struggle between insurgent and dominant discourses—is central in their learning. The nature of this emancipatory experiential learning is not developmental, nor inevitably triumphant.

The actual knowledge people acquire through social action experience, according to Foley, includes self-confidence, critical understanding of how power works in society, and the resources and flexible process required in direct action. They learn the need to support each other, the nature of the stress involved, how action can polarize a community and reveal its structures, and how unsettling it is to challenge your own and others' assumptions. Their learning demystifies how authority works and helps them appreciate people's very different perspectives and the extent to which they can be reconciled. Perhaps the most important knowledge is people learning that they *could* act and that their action *can* make a difference.

The process of learning, observes Foley, is the conscientization or coming to awareness of one's own implication in one's oppression that Freire (1970) identified. People undergo a perspective transformation (Mezirow 1994) in which their understanding of the world changes. But Foley shows how this process is not an individual psychological change, but is embedded in a community of actors. First, the initial participation is sparked in a gradual community awareness of the need to act. Second, the learning process is entangled with opportunities for collective action, the ways people come together, the spaces that emerge for this transformed consciousness to flourish and formulate action, and the ways the community develops an activist discourse. Third, much of the significant change involves people learning connections between them: recognizing the universality and solidarity of their experiences, while learning their diversity of experience and ideology (and how these differences could be exploited by others). Fourth, much significant learning is embedded in their activity and not articulated as learning by the people. Fifth, emancipatory learning is not cumulative but embedded in conflict and developing in unanticipated ways. The learning itself is as continually contested, complex, ambiguous, and contradictory as the struggle between dominant and insurgent forces.

Michel Foucault: Critical Insights for Experience and Learning

Unfortunately, the discourses of experiential learning and lifelong learning have become oppressive and disempowering, claim critical writers working from the poststructural ideas of Michel Foucault. Foucault (1980) explains that subjects are regulated through sociocultural processes (inscription, recording, and calculation against so-called standard norms) that make them "knowable" and thus controllable. Experiential learning discourses limit identity possibilities by insistently separating humans and their perceived "experience" from language, culture, history, and communities of practice into unitary "learning" individuals. Writers examining experiential learning in workplaces have drawn from Foucault's notion of governmentality[8] to criticize the educational management of experiential learning and the regulation of subjects doing the experiencing, for organizational goals (Garrick and Usher 1999; Harrison 2000; Usher and Solomon 1999). Townley (1994) applies Foucault's ideas to criticize the way workers' experiential learning is "governed" by human resource management practices in work organizations. These practices include normalizing judgments based on preconstructed standards, "surveillance," selection and categorizing, self-assessment, and confession. Through the latter practices individuals internalize the disciplines that construct and regulate their identities, and thus individual resistance is subverted.

According to Tobias (1999), Foucault's insights reveal that the ideology of "individualism" embedded in current practices of experiential learning, with its notions of individual choice and individual learning needs, is a social and political construction that shapes particular relations of power. First, the individual is falsely produced as a rational, autonomous, self-governing being rather than a subject positioned in a variety of discourses. Second, the focus on lifelong or experiential learning tends to view this individual as a bundle of learning needs, focusing attention on individuals' skill levels in terms of their capacity to serve the system. This fragments and reduces human identity and experience, tearing people from real material and social networks to be recast as objects of knowledge and targets for educational intervention. Knowledge and skills are implied to be neutral instead of culturally constructed. This also transforms the system's problems into issues of learning for individuals. Thus critique is diverted away from broader cultural, social and economic forces circulating to maintain the (oppressive) system. The solution to problems is assumed to lie in "empowering" individuals to learn continuously, becoming more qualified, innovative, and adaptable to the system's changing needs.

Third, the notion of individuals empowered to take control of their own (experiential) learning actually subverts their resistance to external control by subjugating them to an internalized disciplinary gaze. Foucault (1980) explains how, when subjected to the perpetual surveillance of normalizing practices that classify, measure, and judge them, people begin monitoring and regulating their own behavior to conform with preestablished standards. Eventually, they become self-policing, their "selves" becoming objects of their own critical gaze of measurement and control. Usher and Edwards (1995) criticize

[8] A form of power that is exercised through an ensemble of institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, which results in the formation of a specific governmental apparatus (Foucault, M. "Governmentality." In ***The Foucault Effect***, edited by G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Mills, pp. 87-104. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

"confessional" educational practices such as journaling, life planning, self-evaluation, portfolios, and counseling that are commonly associated with experiential learning. These practices, argue Usher and Edwards, require humans to turn upon themselves as objects of scrutiny and knowledge, to construct a stable rational self, to plan and structure the development of this self, and often to do so under the scrutiny of an educator.

The critical argument is that as individuals we are ultimately disempowered through such practices for two reasons. First, we humans who actually exist as multiple fluctuating and interconnected identities are seduced into believing and constructing for ourselves an illusory autonomous, coherent, stable self that fits dominant culturally approved categories of identity. Second, through technologies of self-governance reinforced by external scrutiny, we humans are subjugated and repressed, anxious because we are continually in need of improvement according to dominant notions of the ideal self and societal needs. The notion of individual choice and freedom within such practices are illusions. "The power of normalization imposes homogeneity but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render differences" (Foucault 1980, p. 184). Individuals become constituted by and eventually dependent on the disciplinary power they have internalized and directed upon themselves.

This Foucauldian approach to understanding social systems has been criticized for being mechanistic, overdeterministic, and inflexible. It may not sufficiently recognize the dynamics of human agency and its consequences in the systems and social networks in which power and discourse circulate. However, it illuminates dynamics of power and regulation embedded in our ways of viewing ourselves. Foucault's argument is that when we as subjects are caught up in and thus controlled by such technologies as reflecting upon "experiential learning," our identities are constructed in particular ways and also our notions of what counts as expertise. This is a homogenizing process that reduces complex experience to observable, discussable, measurable items. Knowledge becomes conceptualized as a substance to be obtained in a logical sequential way, and experience is cast as raw material to be processed and written down for it to become knowledge, a position that Michelson (1996) argues to be patriarchal and dehumanizing. If power is deployed in us as subjects through cultural systems of classification and knowledge, then our perceptions and ways of responding to the world (including what we think of as our experiential learning) are shaped in ways we do not apprehend.

Implications for Adult Educators Suggested by the Critical/Resistance Orientation

In critical pedagogy processes, learners trace the politics and constraints of their contexts of experiential learning. Learning is coming to critical awareness about one's contexts as well as one's own contradictory investments and implications in what knowledge counts in particular communities, how development is "measured," who gets to judge whom and why, and the interests that are served by resistant or development initiatives. Educators help themselves and others become more aware of their own constituted natures, their own continuous role in power relations and the production of meaning, how representations act to represent and construct reality, and how difference is perceived and enacted.

People learn how what they may experience as personal yearnings, despair, conflict, and identity struggles are shaped partly by historical cultural dynamics and ideologies of particular communities.

Through critical pedagogy, groups of people and their values who have been lost or dislocated in rigid narrow identity categories recover and name new "subject positions." It must be understood, in terms of this monograph's focus on experiential learning, that although critical pedagogy is often situated in classrooms, it is also largely acknowledged to unfold in multiple nonformal sites of learning (e.g., consciousness-raising groups, movements of social activism, even individual confrontation with texts that disrupt one's received views). People learn to see through accepted social discourses to discern blurring borders and categories, new hybrid knowledges emerging, and even ultimate incommensurabilities of different cultural practices and groups. As Foucault puts it, "When we undermine their 'naturalness' and challenge the assumptions on which they're based, we can see the possibility for difference ... transformation becomes urgent, difficult, possible" (Foucault in Kritzman 1988, p. 154). Giroux (1996) writes that critical pedagogy can open spaces to discern new futures, craft new identities, and seek social alternatives that may be obscured by current dominant ideologies and struggles.

Freire (1970) urged educators to engage people in dialogue, to name their oppressive experiences and rename them in a process of transforming themselves into empowered agents of social change. This process of "problem posing" helps people to come to consciousness, viewing as *problems* those inequities and authorities repressing their lives that they have come to take for granted as natural and inevitable and viewing themselves as actors that have helped sustain but also can resist repressive forces. Educators play a vital role helping people to "read" their experiences and the structures and discourses that shape them. But, beyond merely a cognitive activity of critical reflection, educators help people engage in social action to name and resist inequities, work collectively to change their own circumstances, and seek alternate possibilities for democratic life.

However, despite educators' sympathies with social justice and desires to fashion a practice enabling adults' learning through social action, they may be inherently unable to enact such critical cultural practice. Heaney (1996) argues that the professionalization of adult educators has subjugated their practice to the marketplace and to its purposes of providing other professionals with knowledge and skill to sustain their claim to disproportionate wealth and power. Thus to ensure their own continued existence, (professional) educators cannot truly support (or even understand) the fight for social justice carried out by "front-line activists."

Lather (1991) urges educators to attend to "poststructural suspicions of rationality, philosophies of presence, and universalizing projects" (p. 6). She certainly believes educators must ground their thinking in liberatory pedagogy, but must constantly question their own veracity, authority, and workings of desire in their practices toward freedom. Similarly, Gore (1993) appeals to critical educators to be rigorous in their own self-examination. They must question the real consequences of engaging people in problem posing and so-called emancipatory dialogue and question especially the authority of their

own positions as the "'good liberator." Gore cautions educators against the tendencies to impose their own grand visions for people's lives or to essentialize and simplify people's experience in the process of critically "problematizing" it. Like Heaney (1996), Gore also raises strong concern about the removal of *ideas* for critical educational practice from the messiness and political realities of social action. She argues that the constraints of the educational situation in formal settings produces a sort of theoretical version of critical practice that often has little to do with the grassroots experiential learning through social action that Freire wrote about.

Critique from Other Perspectives

There has been much criticism of emancipatory views of experiential learning. As Michelson (1999) observes, it is by now a commonplace understanding that experience, liberatory or otherwise, cannot be considered apart from "received meanings that evolve within material structures and cultural and discursive norms" (p. 141). Individuals are multiply positioned; our agency or potential for it changes across shifting contexts and fluid identities constructed and reconstructed in particular moments. Monolithic ideologies, social structures, and large-scale causal theories are deemed unworkable in the face of such fluid cultural expressions and practices (Bauman 1992). Furthermore, we are inscribed by our cultures in such a way that our agency cannot be easily separated from our shifting implications and investments in the multiple communities and discourses of our everyday lives.

Such statements reflect a particular perspective commonly associated with postmodernism—a term of ambiguity, differentiated connotations, and diverse philosophical expressions. Writers aligning themselves with postmodern views have provided thoughtful critique of the emancipatory understanding of learning. Their questions tend to focus on the irreconcilability of fixed notions of identity, subjectivity, culture and transformation with the complexities of plurality, motion, and ambiguity that mark human activity and meaning-making (see Lather 1991, for an extended discussion of this point). Like Lather, many of these writers work within the critical cultural tradition to refine and expand this perspective without losing its commitment to resist oppression. This is an important point for it helps illustrate how this "resistance" perspective, like others discussed in this article, embraces contestation and continued self-interrogation in ways that blur its own definitional boundaries. Lather's (1991) project, for example, is to theorize a defensible alignment between critical social theory and its poststructural challenges along political, social, and pedagogical grounds. Kelly (1997) incorporates Lacanian concepts within critical pedagogy to work toward a socially transformative practice informed by psychoanalytic considerations.

Overzealous cultural critique and reconstruction are a recurring pedagogical issue. Kellner (1995) cautions educators not to suppose a monolithic "dominant ideology" that is inherently manipulative or evil and to remember that people are not a mass of passive, homogeneous noncritical victims of a dominant ideology. Feminist scholars have shown the repressive potential in any emancipatory efforts. Ellsworth (1992) for example, is a well-known voice among many who have questioned the possibility of creating safe

pedagogical spaces where open, equitable dialogue toward "empowerment" can unfold. She rejects the Habermasian "ideal speech" condition popular among emancipatory educators, arguing that subjects are not capable of being fully rational and disinterested, that multiple meanings are endemic, and voices are contradictory and partial across and within subjects. Troubling issues about who presumes enlightenment and how authentic democratic participation can ever be achieved through existing discourses that favor certain knowledge interests over others have not been resolved. The impositional educator who presumes to determine what comprises false consciousness then undertakes to replace it with a particular conception of resistance, for example, has been problematized at length (Lather 1991). Educators' self-reflexivity, exploring their own intrusions and repressions, acknowledging their own inscription by dominant discourses and their own will to power, is not always apparent in critical pedagogy. In addition, there is the problem of where learners are left after so-called empowerment. Giroux (1996) has explored this issue of reconciling transformed consciousness with the demands of surviving the real politics of everyday life. When the educator (defined broadly: an impulse, text, or subject position) is granted such a central position in experiential learning, ethics and the limits of educators' responsibility require address.

Britzman's (1998a) psychoanalytic view critiques the primacy of consciousness in the critical cultural perspective, claiming that individual or collective "critical reflection" is a highly limited means of coming to self-knowledge. Cultural analysis may not be viewed as attending sufficiently to the extraordinary significance of desire and the nuance of the unconscious in determining understandings and behaviors developed through experience. Our attempts at achieving deeper awareness by examining experience solely through rational "critical" thinking are thwarted by the ego's investments in maintaining its own narcissism. Ultimately, the extraordinary faith placed in human ability to achieve emancipation through self-reflexivity has been questioned. Ellsworth (1997) for example, shows how the spaces between one's critical eye and one's own ideologies—themselves both shifting and fluid—are configured by multiple desires and positional investments and multiple contradictory readings.

Enactivists, whose ecological perspective of experiential learning is more fully elaborated in the next section, do not tend to discuss power as a primary determinant of systems' evolution. Nor do they privilege cultural practices and discourses in theorizing emergence of physical and human expressions comprising community. Some reject as too deterministic the structural view of a dominant elite subordinating other groups, or even of subjects regulating themselves through internalized regimes of truth and norms of cultural practice (Foucault 1988). The dualism of individual and cultural embeddedness upon which critical cultural perspectives premise the possibility of agency toward transforming self and culture is also rejected. Sumara and Davis (1997) eschew entirely what they describe as traditional perspectives of domination/oppression as perpetuating negative views of power. They explain that systems theories of learning place much greater emphasis on mutual affect, collectivity, and co-emergence, which transcend the limitations and self-perpetuated negative circles created by power/resistance-based critical thinking.

Co-Emergence: The "Enactivist" Perspective

Enactivism is a theory explaining the *co-emergence* of learner and setting (Maturana and Varela 1987; Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991). This perspective of experiential learning assumes that cognition depends on the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities embedded in a biological, psychological, cultural context. Enactivists explore how cognition and environment become *simultaneously enacted* through experiential learning. The first premise is that the systems represented by person and context are inseparable, and the second is that change occurs from emerging systems affected by the intentional and unintentional tinkering of one with the other.

Themes among Ecological/Enactivist Perspectives

This understanding of co-emergent cognition, identities, and environment begins by stepping aside from notions of knowledge as a substantive "thing" to be acquired or ingested by learners as isolated cognitive agents, thereafter to exist *within* them. Davis and Sumara (1997) explain that instead, enactivism accepts the premise that "cognition exists in the *interstices* of a complex ecology or organismic relationality" (p. 110). Humans are understood to form part of the context itself, as systems that are completely interconnected with the systems in which they act. Maturana and Varela (1987) have represented the unfolding of this interconnection as a series of "structural couplings." When two systems coincide, the "perturbations" of one system excite responses in the structural dynamics of the other. The resultant "coupling" creates a new transcendent unity of action and identities that could not have been achieved independently by either participant.

Educators might understand this phenomenon through the example of conversation, a collective activity in which interaction enfolds the participants and moves beyond them in a "commingling of consciousness" (Davis and Sumara 1997). As each contributes, changing the conversational dynamic, other participants are changed, the relational space among them all changes, and the looping-back changes the contributor. This is "mutual specification" (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991), the fundamental dynamic of systems constantly engaging in joint action and interaction. As actors are influenced by symbols and actions in which they participate, they adapt and learn. As they do so, their behaviors and thus their effects upon the systems connected with them change. With each change these complex systems shift, changing their patterns of interaction and the individual identities of all actors enmeshed in them. Thus the "environment" and the "learner" emerge together in the process of cognition, although this is a false dichotomy: there is no *context* separate from any particular system such as an individual actor.

The apparent similarity of enactivism with situated perspectives articulated by Lave and Wenger (1991) or Greeno (1997) rests in this primacy granted to environment as integrated with cognition, not simply supplemental to the individual consciousness. However, there are fundamental distinctions. Where situated cognition arose within the discipline

of psychology, enactivism is rooted in evolutionary biology. Situated cognition is therefore anthropocentric, premised upon and scrutinizing an individual subject who *develops* through a movement of participation in a community of practice. The interactions comprising participation form the integration of person and context, but autonomous subjectivity and the concept of individual mind remain privileged and fundamentally unchallenged. The person *learns* to participate more effectively by participating. Enactivism on the other hand is premised on ecological systems theory, understanding planetary evolution through multiple systems enmeshed in processes of self-organization and interdependence. Change (such as phenomena that other perspectives may observe as "learning") occurs through disturbances amplified through feedback loops within and among systems. In its more radical enunciations (i.e., Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991), enactivism dissolves human subjectivity and its illusions of individual consciousness and ego at the systems level, for human processes apparently bounded by the individual body (perception, sensation, emotion, thought, digestion, etc.) can be each considered subsumed within larger systems.

Enactivism considers understandings to be embedded in conduct. Davis and Sumara (1997) explain this premise by drawing attention to the knowledge we are constantly enacting as we move through the world. Often called habit or tacit knowledge by others, enactivists view these understandings as existing not within ourselves in ways that drive our actions, but as unfolding in circumstances that evoke these particular actions. As an example, Davis and Sumara show how a "choreography of movement" can be discerned in a particular community, where individuals find themselves swept up in collective patterns of expectation and behavior. Their examples show how much of this joint action exceeds and leaks out of individual attempts to attend to and control unconscious action through critical reflection. The problem lies not in underdeveloped critical abilities that should be educated, but in a false conceptualization of the learning *figure* as separate from the contextual *ground*. Enactivism draws attention to the background and examines myriad fluctuations, subtle interactions, imaginings and intuitions, the invisible implied by the visible, and the series of consequences emerging from any single action. All of these we normally relegate to the backdrop of our focus on whatever we construe to be the significant "learning" event. The focus of enactivism is not on the components of experience (which other perspectives might describe in fragmented terms: person, experience, tools, community, and activity) but on the *relationships* binding them together in complex systems.

Learning is thus cast as continuous invention and exploration, produced through the relations among consciousness, identity, action and interaction, objects, and structural dynamics of complex systems. There is no absolute standard of conduct, because conduct flows ceaselessly. Maturana and Varela (1987) suggest that subsystems in a series of increasingly complex systems together invent changing understandings of what is "adequate conduct" in this particular time and situation, or "consensual domain" (p. 39). "Adequate conduct" is action that serves a particular consensual domain. New possibilities for action are constantly emerging among the interactions of complex systems, and

thus cognition occurs in the possibility for unpredictable shared action. Knowledge cannot be contained in any one element or dimension of a system, for knowledge is constantly emerging and spilling into other systems.

In analyzing a process through which a group learned and changed over time, Sumara and Davis (1997) show the usefulness of enactivism as an explanatory tool. They describe how systems of cognition and evolution interacted in spontaneous, adaptable and unpredictable ways that changed both, resulting in "a continuous enlargement of the space of the possible" (p. 303). In other words, people participate together in what becomes an increasingly complex system. New unpredictable possibilities for thought and action appear continually in the process of inventing the activity, and old choices gradually become unviable in the unfolding system dynamics.

Implications for Adult Educators Suggested by Enactivist/Ecological Perspectives

The enactivist perspective insists that learning cannot be understood except in terms of co-emergence: each participant's understandings are entwined with those of other participants, and individual knowledge co-emerges with collective knowledge. Educational theory also must examine the subtle particularities of "context" created through the learning of complex systems, embedded in their constantly shifting interactional dynamics, and the relations among these particularities. Educators need to become alert to a "complexified awareness ... of how one [individual] exists simultaneously in and across these levels, and of how part and whole co-emerge and co-specify one another" (Davis and Sumara 1997, p. 120). Educators can also help all to understand their involvement and find honest ways to record the expanding space and possibilities. Questions for facilitators are offered by Sumara and Davis (1997): How does one trace the various entangled involvements in a particular activity in a complex system, while attending assiduously to one's own involvement as participant? How can the trajectories of movement of particulate actors in relation to the system's objects be understood and recorded in a meaningful way?

The educator's role might be first, a *communicator*: assisting participants in naming what is unfolding around them and inside them, continually renaming these changing nuances, and unlocking the tenacious grasp of old categories, restrictive or destructive language that strangles emerging possibilities. Second, the educator as *story-maker* helps trace and meaningfully record the interactions of the actors and objects in the expanding spaces. Third, the educator as *interpreter* helps all to make community sense of the patterns emerging among these complex systems and understand their own involvements in these patterns of systems. Naturally, educators must be clear about their own entanglement and interests in the emerging systems of thought and action.

In contexts of experiential learning in organizations, Wheatley (1994)[9] explains ways of understanding and enhancing collective experiential learning based on ecological complexity theory. This approach treats a human individual as a collection of learning systems (i.e, our immune system learns, recognizes, remembers, adapts) that are nested within increasingly larger learning systems. Educators can assist the flow of experiential learning in systems by tracking and showing systems their own evolutionary changes. They can introduce or draw attention to the system's disturbances that create learning potential, and help amplify these disturbances by focusing, naming, and highlighting their significance. Educators can provide feedback loops to a system as it experiments with different patterns leading out from disequilibrium. Finally, educators can help members of a system through the overall messy process they are experiencing in disequilibrium: tracking the emerging patterns, forestalling the urge to contain and control; and working creatively through it to self-organization.

Critique from Other Perspectives

This enactivist perspective has joined debate about experiential learning so recently that critique has not yet become available in educational literature. However, working from basic premises of other perspectives, some challenges can be formulated to the enactivist perspective in anticipation of critique that will no doubt emerge in future writing.

Critique from constructivist views might focus on the lack of full recognition accorded to individual meaning-making and identity-construction processes. A slightly similar complaint (using different language and assumptions) might be launched from psychoanalytic perspectives, which would likely challenge what appears to be the disappearance of the subject, along with the agency and resistance of individuals working through complex desires. Although Davis and Sumara (1997) claim that personal subjectivities are no means abandoned but rather understood as "mutually specifying" one another, it is sometimes unclear how individual integrity is maintained in a "commingling of consciousness" (p. 110).[10] Enactivists pose a rather seamless link between cognition and interaction in community. Constructivists would argue that there are aspects of an individual's subjective world of cognition that are not available through dialogue and not present in action. As well, the connection to one particular context of individuals' personal histories and their dynamic processes of change and growth within other systems is not yet fully articulated in the enactivist understanding. Finally, the relationship of individual knowers to theoretical knowledge existing apart from a particular community of actions also must be articulated.

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[9]Margaret Wheatley can be characterized as a practitioner and popular writer in organizational development approaches drawing on the "new science." Her work represents a simple introduction to these concepts. For further understanding, educators should consult the originators of general systems theory such as von Bertalanffy (1971). Other important writers in the general area of complexity theory include Casti (1994), Capra (1996), Prigogine (1997), and Waldrop (1992).

[10]Systems theory understands a person as a system, both nested within other systems and linked with other systems at molecular levels, but integral as an individual system bounded from others. Nonetheless, without acknowledging psychic dimensions, it is difficult to argue convincingly that individual subjectivity and cognition exists both alongside and mingled within general systemic jostling and melding.

Ethical issues of justice and right action, fundamental to education, become somewhat problematic in the enactivist perspective as presented here. How can an educational project for change be formulated that adequately accounts for the complexified ongoing systemic perturbations, without being deliberately illusory? That is, if any action of an educator or other particular element of a system becomes enfolded in that system's multiple interactions and unpredictable expansions of possibility, what sort of reference point can be used to guide intention toward some deliberate pedagogical goal? On another point, how can we explain the differential change that different elements of a system appear to register? If all interactions between people co-emerge in ways that specify each other, how is it that educators often influence learners more than they are influenced in their interactions? And finally, what moral choices for wise judgment are available for educators within notions like "adequate conduct"? Because they are self-referenced (Waldrop 1992), complex systems that many educators would abhor do often survive and expand in sustainable ways. Cancer and neo-Nazism are two examples. There must be a more defensible framework than simply co-emergence to guide understandings of cognition.[11] These questions are not obstacles or reasons to reject enactivist perspectives of cognition. They simply serve to point out further paradoxes that must be named as educators struggle to find ways to act within complexity.

A challenge to the enactivist view from a critical cultural perspective may observe that discussion of experiential learning is inseparable from cultural practices, social relations, images, and representations. Perspectives such as enactivism do not address inevitable power relations circulating in human cultural systems. Therefore, the influences on patterns of co-emergence exerted by culturally determined meaning categories such as gender/race/sexuality/class/religion may be indiscernible from a systems perspective. In addition, neither systems nor situative perspectives appear to attend to the way cultural practices (such as tools of discourse, image, and representation) have been shaped and maintained by dominant groups in the system and continue to sustain interests of some participants in the system more than others. Further, a systems view like enactivism demands that the interests and identities of individual elements be surrendered to the greater community. Therefore, individuals become vulnerable to a few who manipulate the system's discourses to sustain their own power, ensuring that their experiences become the most valued knowledge in the collective.

Conclusion

This chapter offers arguments, issues, and suggested implications for educators generated by four different theoretical perspectives that raise important questions about the nature of experiential learning. The categories of psychoanalytic theory (*Interference*), situated sociocultural learning theory (*Participation*), various critical cultural learning theories (*Resistance*), and ecological complexity and enactivist learning theories (*Co-emergence*) are highly constructed, as are all classification schemes.

[11]One reviewer of this monograph, Verna Willis of Georgia State University, contests this position convincingly. She argues, "The key is in (1) purpose, and (2) relationship as matters essential to system survival and viability. Co-emerging life, as an ecological phenomenon, carries its own ethic ... Power relations are shifting, not reified. Surrender isn't the issue. Contribution is."

The interference/psychoanalytic orientation suggests that educators need to recognize the complex and largely unconscious dynamics of desire occurring at the heart of experiential learning and teaching encounters. Rather than attempting to complete the desire for knowledge, educators should help people dwell in and work through the difficult psychic struggles of coming to face the self. Finally, educators are encouraged to look carefully at their own contradictory desires, attempting to understand their own unconscious longing, and confront the difficult knowledges they resist.

The participation/situative orientation to experiential learning suggests that educators can assist people in becoming fuller participants in a particular community by creating authentic conditions for people to experience and practice in. Educators can arrange direct and indirect guidance for newcomers to a community of practice and provide assistance such as scaffolding in activities known as cognitive apprenticeship. Educators are encouraged to recognize how particular networks of action affect learning and how spatial and temporal geographies of a situation influence the networks of action. Changes to the environment, tools, and opportunities for interaction in a community profoundly affect learning. Educators can find pedagogical entry points in a community through recognizing possibilities for such changes and animating some action toward making them.

The resistance/critical cultural orientation suggests that educators assist learners in critically questioning their collective experience. In particular, people become empowered by validating their own experience, examining how power circulates through their own communities, and analyzing how it shapes their perceptions of their own experience and their learning. Educators are invited to examine how human identities and creative potential are restricted or distorted in their experiences and to assist people toward liberation and new visions for action.

The co-emergent/enactivist orientation to experiential learning focuses educators' attention on the unfolding systems and subsystems of a learning community, including their own implications in those systems. The embodiment of knowledge and the *relationships* among the elements of a system—such as its subsystems (including individual actions), images, language, space, trajectories of joint action and dialogue—are significant. Learning is embedded in all aspects of the system, not just the minds of individual people. Learning is doing is being.

Each of these perspectives on experiential learning is its own world with its own defining schemata. Within its own world, any single perspective here would subsume, interpret, and classify the others in particular ways.[12] Even the act of comparing one with another is potentially problematic. The equalized representation of these categories in this monograph masks the differential influence each wields on adult education practice, social theory, and on each other.

[12]For examples of this very phenomenon, see Mezirow (1996), who subsumes other theories of cognition under a preferred perspective "transformative learning"; and debates on cognition published in the ***Educational Researcher*** (Anderson, Reder, and Simon 1997; Greeno 1997; Prawat 1997) in which different writers assess each other's perspectives according to the postulates of their own premises.

These are the compromises of presenting different theoretical perspectives on experiential learning comparatively in order to produce a certain clarity. But this is a temporary classification, a starting point intending to illuminate openings where serious questions may be raised and dialogue encouraged among different positions regarding the nature, purpose, and role of educators in experiential learning. The limitations of this classification may perhaps be overlooked in face of its potential usefulness.

Concluding Comments

A careful comparison of theoretical frames is needed to help researchers and educators better understand and name the various processes occurring as experiential learning and constitute their own roles relative to these processes in moral, sensitive ways. The perspectives highlighted in this monograph may help interrupt dominant views of experiential learning as reflective knowledge construction and may open spaces for dialogue between situative and enactivist, constructivist, critical, and psychoanalytic voices. These perspectives can also move us toward developing more robust theoretical tools for experiential learning that integrate themes within the issues of reflection, interference, participation, power, and co-emergence as they are raised by different perspectives. Meanwhile, comparative examination of different perspectives can enlighten and raise new questions for each perspective, as well as help researchers, theorists, and educators situate and think carefully about beliefs of experience and learning underpinning their own practice.

Producing a synthesis of these five perspectives in terms of their implications for educators is perhaps impossible and theoretically unsound.[1] Each view enfolds a different understanding of the positioning of educators, learners, and learning and of the relationship between the theory of learning and the practice of teaching. Alternatively, one might try transcendence to a domain of theoretical "eclecticism," which as Wilson and Myers (2000) argue, is most often the stance of the practitioner:

> Practitioners tend to be opportunistic with respect to different theoretical conceptions: they might try viewing a problem from one theoretical perspective, then another, and compare results. This stance might be termed "grab-bag" but we prefer to think of it as problem- or practitioner-centered. People, rather than ideologies, are in control. The needs of the situation rise above the dictates of rules, models, or even standard values. (p. 248)

However, even this view of a single actor choosing to "apply" particular ideas to actions according to the demands of the immediate context is itself located within one perspective, the situative view, which others might reject as unadvisable, impossible, or theoretically inaccurate as a representation of what that actor may think he or she is doing. Indeed, certain streams of constructivism would question the cognitive possibility of "paradigm hopping." And certain theories of epistemology would not accept the theoretical assumption that perspectives derived from fundamentally disparate worldviews can ever be integrated or even adequately represented side by side as they are presented here.

These are all issues of boundaries. As Edwards (1998b) has shown, the boundaries separating knowledge are drawn through an exercise of power, demarcating who and what is included or excluded. But Edwards goes on to argue that boundaries are also dynamic and increasingly permeable; through complex interplay and various kinds of boundary crossings and translation through social micro-practices, they are continually

[1]Some have argued that systems theory/complexity theory in fact does synthesize the other positions, which, in its view, are unnecessarily fragmenting.

enacted and renegotiated. New identities, new practices, and new hybrids of meaning are opening in this continuous boundary differentiation/ redifferentiation.

So, now that these five different views of experiential learning have been bounded as distinct categories for purposes of some clarification, further research and dialogue should proceed to disrupt these boundaries. The classificatory dimensions used in this monograph require critique, examining their current influences in theory construction about cognition and experience and experimenting with alternate ways of understanding and representing learning perspectives. There are many possible readings and combinations of themes within perspectives. For example, perspectives sharing a subject-centered philosophy of consciousness (reflection and some emancipatory views of resistance) can be counterpoised to conceptions that decenter the subject (participation, co-emergence and poststructural perspectives of resistance). Enactivism resonates with psychoanalytic theory on some dimensions and situated cognition on others. Wilson and Myers (2000) argue that situated cognition actually embeds fundamental premises of early behaviorist theory, and Wilson (1993) shows its alliance with critical theory. Some streams of critical cultural theory align with constructivist notions of cognition, others with psychoanalytic or poststructural theories.

The further challenge is to examine the omissions, links, and blurrings among these perspectives to locate points where they already agree or where they may complement one another. More in-depth comparison should identify and probe, with careful analysis of terms and conditions, points of complete disagreement or incommensurability. These points of controversy may help us choose the most imminent questions for further inquiry into the nature of experiential learning. Then discussion should open exploration of the movements within and between the perspectives, examining the contradictory currents, the mutual influences, and the relationship of different perspectives to broader sociocultural movements in thought.

The phenomenon of "experiential learning" itself needs to be continually challenged and unraveled. Why has it become such a popular domain for adult education? Why have its boundaries expanded dangerously to subjugate almost any kind of experience, public or private, performative or introspective, individual or collective? In the current discourses of lifelong learning, experiential learning has been linked ubiquitously to industrial purposes and economic imperatives. Critics such as those represented throughout this monograph have argued loudly against this reification and regulation of experiential learning as some sort of endless human capital project, in which adult educators become the servants of a global market machine. Educators instead need to keep puncturing the boundaries, refusing to accept too quickly a category of pedagogical practice called experiential learning. Our further research and practice as educators must continue to critically examine its discursive power, its historical claims in knowledge production, and the interests invested in it.

In contexts of adult education, research might explore further implications for adult educational practice within different perspectives of experiential learning as represented here. More pressing, perhaps, is to question the very premise of inserting educators and

their various baggage of pedagogical forms and demands into the phenomenon called experiential learning. As this monograph shows, adult educators could be accused of having engaged in highly coercive and regulatory practices under the banner of experiential learning. What sort of praxis is morally justifiable, within what limits, and informed by what understandings of experiential learning? We should continue the dialogue about experiential learning in educational practice, allowing thoughtful interrogation among and blurring between various orientations, without dissolving into a trendy mix of technique.

Finally and most important, we must never stop questioning our own personal motives and intentions in engaging that which we decide to call others' experiential learning, regardless of the theoretical perspective we choose to frame our practice. Are we attempting to manage experience? How do we presume to understand others' "experience," and under what rationale do we insert ourselves into others' experience? To what ends, and for whose interests, ultimately? How do we understand our own implications in our work with others?

This monograph has avoided ethical arbitration of the responses to these questions. The responsibility falls to the reader to consider carefully just what he or she is attempting to do through educational practice and why. Ultimately, this continual questioning of practice, along with continual experimenting, sense-making and struggling, is what this document aims to support.

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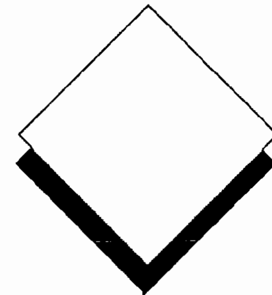

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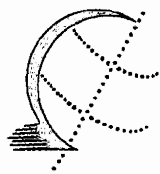
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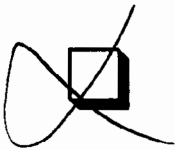

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