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.

[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.