

INFORMAL LEARNING: SOME UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHIES

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Abstract

In the theory and practice of adult education and training, much of the writing on informal learning has focused on three main topics. These topics tend to represent the importance of informal learning as a valid form of knowledge acquisition; they explore how people learn from experience, and they seek to establish how learning from experience can be best facilitated and assessed. A postmodern critique of experiential learning has also emerged which challenges the arguments of each of these perspectives. The postmodern critique asks "why has this form of learning become an important discourse at this particular historic moment?" This article is primarily concerned with the underlying philosophies of these topics. It argues that the uses of informal learning will tend to embody the values and ultimate goals of its implicit philosophy. Developing a socially useful theory to eliminate oppression now requires attention to the elusive conditions of post modernity, and informal learning—at work and in education—is a central feature of these conditions.

Résumé

Les écrits théoriques et pratiques sur l'apprentissage informel traitent principalement de trois sujets. On y décrit l'importance de l'apprentissage informel en tant que mode valide d'acquisition de connaissances; on y explore les méthodes employées par les apprenants en situation informelle; enfin, on cherche des moyens pour soutenir et évaluer les apprentissages informels. Une critique postmoderne de l'apprentissage expérientiel remet en question chacune de ces trois perspectives, en posant d'abord la question: «Pourquoi cette forme d'apprentissage occupe-t-elle une place aussi importante dans le discours actuel, à ce moment de l'histoire?» Le présent article se penche sur les implications philosophiques de cette question. On verra que l'apprentissage informel reflète des valeurs, des buts et une philosophie implicites. Afin d'élaborer une théorie sociale utile à la lutte contre l'oppression, il faut tenir compte des conditions cachées de la post-modernité; parmi ces conditions, l'apprentissage informel en milieu de travail et dans les institution d'enseignement occupe une place de premier plan.

Learning from experience is never neutral, never independent of sociality. This examination thus holds an important assumption that a person's social positioning will be influential in determining his or her access to and experience of "learning opportunities." Social positioning strongly influences one's identity, leading to different "knowledges of reality." In the taken for granted world of "reality," adult educators and trainers will inevitably be more comfortable working with an ethic of worker empowerment; others may, for instance, prefer an ethic of corporate efficiency. The critical implication is that the conception one holds of experience is

tied to a politics of learning. In other words, "experience" can never be "read" as unproblematic. As Usher and Edwards argue:

...there is no single ordered view of the world to be imparted, but multiple "realities" to be constructed through an already interpreted experience. Our knowledge and understanding of history and the present are relative and partial, dependent upon the meanings we take and which regulate and construct our experience. (1944, p. 199)

Wildemeersch expresses this notion in terms of the way assumptions about "valid research" has tended to frame the literature:

...in such a way that the contributions of "individual actors" are emphasized, or overemphasized; or important insights into the intersubjective character of human discourse, the "big" factors, are given preeminence, or, not sufficiently taken into consideration depending on your perspective. (1992, p. 54)

Mindful of this tendency in adult learning literature to privilege "the individual" as being at the very center of knowledge production (and acquisition), *or* privilege social/structural context, the following sections address: (a) prevalent definitions of informal learning, (b) assumptions of experiential learning, (c) the politics of learning from experience, and (d) postmodern standpoints on informal learning.

These sections explore the relationship between experience and learning. This relationship is often analyzed with learning being contingent upon experience; that is, explanation about what is learned commences with experience. Yet it can also be argued that "experience" is precisely that which is in need of explanation (Usher, Bryant and Johnston, in press). Any approach to using experience for learning will generate its own representations of experience and thus learning. Indeed, this principle has been a cornerstone of Freirean "action-reflection-action" pedagogy, although this tends to be more discussed in the context of nonformal education rather than informal learning.

Informal Learning

Wain identifies the following "technical definitions worked with in lifelong learning:"

Formal education: the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded "education system," running from primary schools through the university and including, in addition to general academic studies, a variety of specialized programs and institutions for full-time technical and professional training.

Informal learning: the truly lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and the educative influences and resources in his or her environment—from family and neighbors, from work and play, from the market place, the library and the mass media.

Nonformal education: any organizational activity outside the established formal system—whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity—that is intended to serve identifiable learning clientele and learning objectives. (1992, p. 54)

In reading this article it is very important to distinguish between *informal learning* and *nonformal education*. Marsick and Watkins point out "nonformal is where education is difficult to access and frequently tied to social class issues; nonformal education is often introduced as a second chance for credentials, credibility, or knowledge and skill development" (1990, p. 32). This article does not focus on nonformal education as is often practiced in the Freirean sense.

Conventional definitions of informal learning usually refer to its processes: mentoring, networking, working in teams, receiving feedback, and trial and error. To briefly reiterate, Marsick and Watkins define informal and incidental learning by contrasting them with formal learning:

Formal learning is typically institutionally sponsored, classroom-based, and highly structured. Informal learning, a category that includes incidental learning, may occur in institutions, but is not typically classroom-based or highly structured, and control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner. Incidental learning, a subcategory of informal learning is a by-product of some other activity, such as task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, sensing the organizational culture, trial and error experimentation, or even formal learning.

They add that:

Informal learning can be deliberately encouraged by an organization, or it can take place despite an environment not highly conducive to learning. Incidental learning on the other hand, almost always takes place in everyday experience although people are not always conscious of it. (1990, p. 12)

Within this definition is an interest in how to make informal learning effective: "deliberately encouraged." It also acknowledges environmental barriers which are not "conducive to learning." It is precisely this underlying instrumental interest and concern about organizational development which is of interest here. Wexler (1993), Gee (1994), and Barnett (1994) each identify such concern with the new *vocationalizing* of education. This vocationalism is promoting work-based learning curricula and assessments and new linkages between work-based learning and formal education.

These developments have major implications for industry trainers' roles, purposes and assessment procedures. Employees now desire to have their informal learning "recognized" so that it can be translated into "credit" in formal courses. In some instances it can translate to extra remuneration. Questions about the precise nature of these new challenges and trends, and how they are being articulated and implemented are thus central issues to this literature review. The notion of learning from experience is clearly located within a broader discourse of workplace and education reform. My interest is empirical, but also socially critical in the sense that Wexler (1993) refers to a "corporatist reorganization" of higher education and training. Notable in this reorganization are the new "partnerships" of the state, business corporations, and significant groups of educational professionals which are effecting change in the infrastructure and, ultimately, the very meaning of

education. Informal learning is therefore a feature of this discourse, relating directly to the links between education and work.

Interest in informal learning, particularly in the workplace, is growing quite dramatically. Paralleling the discourse on workplace learning is a body of research (frequently funded by government, sponsored by industry) and theory within education (general and vocational), sociology, cognitive psychology, cultural psychology, ecological psychology, and anthropology. This body tends to suggest that authentic settings such as the workplace provide a basis for rich learning experiences (Berryman, 1993; Billett, 1992; Carnevale, Gainer, and Villet, 1990; Lave and Wenger, 1991; and Stevenson, 1994;). The outcomes of learning through socially and culturally authentic, work-based activities, proposes Billett (1992), have the potential to be robust and highly transferable because the process has the capability of developing deep layers of propositional and procedural knowledge. The key to the transferability of work-based learning, suggests Stevenson (1994), resides in the rich base of higher order procedural knowledge. The optimum path to these higher order cognitive functions is, argues Pea (1987), through engagement with authentic (workplace) activities within a "purposeful" cultural and social context.

A key assumption about informal learning in the workplace in much of this research is that it has something to do with individuals (subjects) apprehending experience, reasoning, or logically thinking through their direct experience and giving that experience meaning. But it is worth pointing out that the knowledge, skills, and competencies gained in the workplace represent particular kinds of knowledge. And it is operational knowledge, where personal and job-related developments are integrated; that is, valorized. Mechthild Hart argues that this approach can undermine the critical intent of education by "blocking a fuller understanding of the cultural dynamics behind destructive and divisive economic and social arrangements" (1993, p. 19).

Furthermore, much of the research on work-based learning fails to acknowledge the effects of the representational work its own theorizing has upon "authorizing" particular types of experience and what constitutes an "authentic" setting. For example, the conception of the optimum path to transferable work-based learning illustrates a cognitive science theory which posits higher order cognitive functions as a "truth" about experience. This discursively produces experience in a very particular way. And there is nothing neutral about this representation. It emphasizes the training of skills for present and future job requirements where transferable work-based learning is, as Hart points out, "oriented towards maintaining or restoring the economic status quo" (1993, p. 19). Indeed, subjective experience is not necessarily an incontrovertible starting (or concluding) point in any analysis of what has been learned from experience.

Here, Heidegger's (1962) philosophy becomes particularly useful:

Knowledge and understanding are not the product of deliberate, conscious and methodological acts of the ordinary subject but an encounter and engagement with the world where pre-understandings constitute a structure of

intelligibility, an "absence" which is yet the condition of knowing anything. (in Usher, 1992, p. 205)

In formal learning, the "absence" tends to be addressed by the presence of predetermined programs where subject experts, curriculum designers, teachers, academics, and bosses construct desirable knowledge. A key attribute of informal learning which contrasts with a codified or disciplinary based knowledge approach is a focus on "the everyday" (Foley, 1993). This approach, which rests upon Habermas' theory of communicative action for its philosophical justification, holds that what happens in the individuals' encounter and engagement with their problems, tasks, and dilemmas is fundamental to their learning. The processes involved in dealing with (and learning from) the apparently trivial tasks of day to day living are also important themes for Blackburn and Blackburn (in Jeffs and Smith, 1990). Jeffs and Smith make this interest in "day to day" processes explicit:

Informal education is a special set of processes which involves the adoption of certain broad ways of thinking and acting so that people can engage in what is going on. It cannot be simplistically defined by a set of curricula aims. (1990, p. 3)

There are considerable theoretical as well as political differences and discontinuities among writers contributing to the notion of informal learning. For example, Marsick and Watkins (1990) suggest that the "everyday focus" offers possibilities for improving learning qualities in large complex organizations. In making this assertion they draw upon human capital theory whereby progress and development are inextricably linked to the organization's interests and economic performance. Foley, by way of contrast, applies concepts drawn from contestation theory to informal learning in two Australian women's learning centers. He finds that much "embedded learning is generated by *conflict* between people within the centers" (1993, p. 21). Saddington (1990), however, stresses the *atmosphere* within which people connect with each other and perform their tasks. Sinclair (1990) also underlines the centrality of *culture*, but at individual and organizational levels. Whereas Foreman (1990) highlights *personality* and the ways in which practitioners conduct their role as being particularly influential in one's learning.

Viewing these perspectives together, one can discern the tendency in the literature to privilege social/cultural context, or individual autonomy in one's informal learning. Some are theoretically indebted to critical notions - thus being skeptical about the workplace as an "educative environment" (contestation theory). Some favor the idea of development-work even though this can silently accept existing economic and social arrangements. Other perspectives such as Foreman's are influenced by the traditions of an individualistic social-psychology. Nonetheless, some familiar cultural forms emerge in the various perspectives: people engaged in day to day situations and interventions; people trying to make sense of their lives. These cultural forms remind us of the reflexive nature of social life. That is, social life has the capacity to change as our knowledge and thinking changes. As Carr and Kemmis put it,

Social and educational thinkers must cope with this reflexivity...the "truths" they tell must be seen as located in particular historical circumstances and

social contexts, and as answers to particular questions asked in the intellectual context of a particular time. (1986, p. 42-43)

Given the reflexive nature of social life and post industrial doubts about the nature of truth in learning, the above perspectives should not be read as definitional. Rather they are epistemological indicators which help locate informal learning under the broader notion of *experiential learning*. Indeed, Andresen, Boud, and Cohen note that experience-based learning is of particular interest to adult educators because it encompasses formal learning, informal learning, non-formal education, lifelong learning, incidental learning and workplace learning (1995). Cervero notes that current researchers are not the first to observe that learning from experience is a central way that people create their world and give meaning to it:

John Dewey most recently made this point and David Hume before him and Aristotle before him... However, for the better part of this century, our society has given legitimacy to knowledge that is formal, abstract, and general, while devaluing knowledge that is local, specific and based on practice... For this we owe a debt to Plato and Socrates, who believed that for something to count as knowledge it had to be de-contextualized, generalized and abstracted to cover a range of situations. (Cervero, 1992 in Beckett, 1993, p. 4)

The human agency/social context argument is of central importance to Dewey's thesis. Marsick and Watkins draw on Dewey's experiential learning orthodoxy to argue that "learning takes place through an ongoing dialectical process of action and reflection" (1990, p. 8). But to use reflection for learning, one must consciously become aware that they are actually learning. This implies intentionality and thus rests heavily upon a paradigm of consciousness. And it is precisely this paradigm which is important to Giddens' (1983, 1986) theory of social structuration. Giddens, although not directly focussing on informal learning, emphasizes the notion of expanded consciousness by conceptualizing structure as "both the medium and the outcome of the human activities it recursively organizes" (1986, p. 533).

Intentionality in thinking critically about the presuppositions with which people live is thus an important assumption of both experiential learning and critical social theory. It is a foundation for consequent action. The following sections therefore examine this assumption. It asks questions about the level of intentionality in one's learning and addresses the critical notion of human agency in experiential learning literature. The dilemmas faced by practitioners when personal values and workplace requirement clash, and how reflection is said to help one's understandings of these dilemmas (Boud and Walker, 1993; Kolb, 1984), are important issues which are briefly explored. At another level, critical questions are raised as to why organizations might seek to structure informal learning and what this "structuring" may lead to (or away from).

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning or experience-based learning is based on a set of assumptions identified as:

1. Experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning.
2. Learners actively construct their own experience.
3. Learning is a holistic experience.
4. Learning is socially and culturally constructed.
5. Learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs.

(Andresen, Boud, and Cohen, 1995, p. 207-8)

Some powerful tensions exist within and between these assumptions, for example, that learners "actively construct their own experience" whilst, at the same time, "learning is socially and culturally constructed." On the surface these assumptions appear to represent a dichotomy. It is precisely this territory which is explored here, as important differences exist between adult education as practiced within an individualistic discourse of personal empowerment, and a pedagogy of critical social theory. That both are assumed as underpinning experiential learning is intriguing as they carry such different implications for practice.

Adult learning theory—within the discourse of "personal empowerment"—holds that learning can become most effective in overcoming barriers or blind-spots, if the emotions associated with one's identity are dealt with (at least partly) in the learning process Mezirow (1990). This is a position shared by many adult educators in the "humanistic tradition" which holds that the individual may be most productive when she feels that work is personally meaningful and not simply an instrumental means to another end. What is "personally meaningful" is thus critical to learning, and a problematic to any reconciliation of the above assumptions. For example, Andresen et. al. cite the words of Mao Tse Tung to show the links between experience and action, learning and knowing and between political action and social transformation:

...all genuine knowledge originates in direct experience...human knowledge can in no way be separated from practice...practice is higher than (theoretical) knowledge. Whoever wants to know a thing has no way except by coming into contact with it; that is, by living (practicing) in its environment...practice, knowledge, again practice, and again knowledge...such is the dialectical-materialist theory of the unity of knowing and doing (Mao Tse Tung, 1968, p. 20, in Andresen et al., 1995, p. 212)

This elevation of "practice" over "theory," coming from Chairman Mao, has deep ironies. It was his own theories, his own interpretations of Marxism-Leninism—applied to Chinese conditions—which lead directly to such momentous events as the Communists' "Great March," the "Hundred Flowers" campaign, the "Cultural Revolution," and ideology-led practice on a grand scale.¹ Ideology-led practice, or as Lather puts it "adopting an openly ideological stance" (1986, p. 63), can be seen as simply leading to a new form of oppression—rendering the notion of

¹ Jung Chang's autobiographical account of Mao's role (in ideology-led practice) claims: "Mao's ignorance of how an economy worked, [his] almost metaphysical disregard for reality, might have been interesting in a poet, but in a leader with absolute power was quite another matter. One of its main components was a deep-seated contempt for human life" (1991, p. 293).

a "truly" liberating education as very dubious indeed. The epistemological, ontological, and ethical assumptions which underpin the individualistic-humanist discourse of adult education, and the assumptions of a critical social-transformation practice are poles apart but central to what might constitute "meaningful" work to a trainer.

An interesting attempt at constructing an overarching framework for making sense of experiential learning is Weil and McGill's "villages." They view experiential learning as "a spectrum of meanings, practices and ideologies which emerge out of the work and commitments of people" (1989, p. 3). In this spectrum they discern four emphases on experiential learning. Each emphasis is the basis for a cluster of interrelated ideas, concerns, and values which they refer to as "villages." The villages include:

1. The assessment and accreditation of prior experiential learning experiences.
2. Experiential learning and change in higher and continuing education.
3. Experiential learning and social change.
4. Personal growth and development.

Weil and McGill hold that persons or organizations which know only their own village, will not understand it. It is through dialogue across villages that we are enabled to consider what we intend and what we do from new perspectives. Boud supports the Weil and McGill proposition about the need for dialogue across villages, but adds that "at the heart of the main traditions is the role of autonomy, and the variety of approaches which might promote the individual's autonomy" (in Warner-Weil, 1989, p. 40). He points out that the variety of approaches can be located within the main traditions in adult learning which include:

1. Training and efficiency in learning.
2. Self-directed learning and the andragogy school.
3. Learner-centered education and the humanistic educations.
4. Critical pedagogy and social action.

(Boud in Warner-Weil, 1989, p. 40)

The traditions, which highlight the main conceptions of experiential learning, share a central notion: autonomy. Irrespective of the main approaches to making use of experience, the subject's autonomy is of central importance. As Usher puts it:

Adult education works with an ethics of personal empowerment and autonomy. In this sense, adult education is part of the educational project of the Enlightenment and because of this is cast in and expresses itself through a discourse of individual agency. (1992, p. 201)

This is epistemologically and ontologically charged of course, and it must be asked—how good an account of reality does this theory of experiential learning provide? Factors commonly cited to support experiential learning theory are gender, race, age, occupational status or category, geographical location (place of residence), and social origins. Systematic distortions from the effects of segregating the

"factors" can, however, be problematic. For instance, conceiving of experience as the sum of one's social relations, how one is positioned within social hierarchies of power, and affects of this positioning upon one's emotions, is important to the humanistic discourse of reflecting upon and learning from experience. But to construe experiential learning as being able to stand outside these factors, to know and understand one's experience from reflection, requires the acceptance of a major assumption. The assumption is that "the subject, through conscious awareness, can be both the source and shaper of its experience" (Usher, 1992, p. 207). Usher's point is that the theory of experiential learning, most common in adult education practice, presupposes too much about individual "agency."

To address the question of whether experiential learning theory tends to presuppose too much about individual "agency", it is necessary to expand upon the notion of "reflection". It is reflection which has a key role to play as "the bridge between experience and learning" (Usher, 1992, p. 206). Following the review of reflection, this article then considers issues related to the politics of learning from experience and postmodern standpoints on the theories of experiential learning generated thus far.

Reflection and the autonomous subject. Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) refer to reflection as "a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations." Mezirow views this definition as including "making inferences, generalizations, analogies, discriminations, and evaluations as well as feeling, remembering, and solving problems" (1990, p. 8) This definition implies using beliefs to make interpretations, analysis and judgements however unaware one may be of doing so. He adds:

...if reflection is understood as an assessment of how or why we have perceived, thought, felt, or acted, it must be differentiated from an assessment of how best to perform these functions when each phase of an action is guided by what we have learned before. (Mezirow, 1990, p. 9)

Cell seeks to clarify the distinction between action and reflection. Where action can be a creative process, but involves our prejudices and distortions; reflection requires "attending to the distortions in our reasoning and attitudes" (Cell, 1984). Miller argues that "attending to our reasoning and attitudes" (1989, p. 13) requires what C. Wright Mills called:

A quality of mind that will help...[people] to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and what may be happening within themselves. The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of the individuals ...the sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. (Mills, 1979, p. 11-12)

Griffin uses just such an imagination in her research article on the "auto-didactic or self-directed process of learning" (1987, p. 209) in relation to her own home town.

Her project identified five dimensions of learning, sometimes operating individually, sometimes together:

1. The rational.
2. The physical (or physiological).
3. The emotional.
4. The relational.
5. The metaphorical (or intuitive).

She argues that there is constant shifting between, and interaction among these dimensions, which in turn are perceived through "valuing and judging systems" (1987, p. 210)

What is missing in this type of analysis, however, is a more comprehensive critique of the overall social and economic context within which this "self-directed" experiential learning occurs. It could be argued for instance, that social conditions and context can (and do) systematically exclude some groups from learning and developmental opportunities. From the more individualistic perspective, Candy (1991) also points out that Griffin did not introduce the notions of cognition (or metacognition) or any higher-order processes mediating the transitions to her analysis. However, this is a very specific (narrow) critique of an important hypothesis about the nonlinear nature of learning. Griffin's findings, for example, suggest a picture of enormous **complexity and unpredictability** in adult learning. Subsequent studies such as Taylor's (1986, 1987) have refined this hypothesis identifying four phases of self-directed learning: (a) detachment, (b) divergence, (c) engagement, and (d) convergence. She argues:

The four phases occur in a consistent order around a particular learning theme or problem being worked on:

1. **Disconfirmation** (phase transition): A major discrepancy between expectations and experience.
2. **Disorientation**: A period of intensive disorientation and confusion accompanied by a crisis of confidence and withdrawal from other people who are associated with the source of confusion.
3. **Naming the problem** (phase transition): Naming the problem without blaming self and others.
4. **Exploration**: Beginning with relaxation with unresolved issue, an intuitively guided, collaborative and open ended exploration with a gathering of insights, confidence and satisfaction.
5. **Reflection** (phase transition): A private reflective review.
6. **Reorientation**: A major insight or synthesis experience with a new approach to the learning (or teaching) task.
7. **Sharing the discovery** (phase transition): Testing out the new understanding with others.
8. **Equilibrium**: A period in which the new perspective and approach is elaborated, refined and applied. (Taylor, 1987, p. 183)

Candy points out that Taylor's work, [like Mezirow (1990), and Schön (1983; 1987)], posits "disorientation, or the collapse of the learner's frame of reference or assumptive world" (Candy, 1991, p. 176) as a critical starting point for the learning process. Taylor's hypothesis also firmly locates reflection within a psychologistic discourse. The conception of "subjects" in terms of linear temporality, and experience in terms of cumulative (albeit helix-like) progression, is simply reflecting rather than challenging the founding assumptions of the theoretical representation of the research. In this case the theory represented is that of an individualistic social-psychology consistent with the traditions of the "humanistic discourse."

This discourse celebrates experience, and learning through experience, as a means of individual empowerment. It is a discourse whereby learners actively define their own experience by attaching meaning to events. As Boud, Cohen, and Walker put it "we may use language and ideas to express meaning, and in the process use externally defined objects, but only the person who experiences can ultimately give meaning to the experience" (1993, p. 10). It is precisely this meaning-giving status accorded the person which more "radical" approaches to experiential learning (Usher, 1992; Usher and Edwards, 1994; Wildemeersch, 1992) seriously dispute. They draw upon Foucault's counter history of ideas (Foucault, 1982, p. 208) to refute the idea of individual "agency" and thus the status of "meaning-giver." Foucault views "the subject" as:

An effect of, to some extent subjection of particular, historically located, disciplinary processes and concepts which enable people to consider themselves as individual subjects and which constrain them from thinking otherwise. (Foucault, 1982, p. 208)

Foucault, in giving primacy to "historical situatedness" and "disciplinary processes" (power/knowledge formations), seriously challenges the foundations of conventional adult education theory based on personal empowerment and autonomy.

Upon reflection. Reflection is concerned with discerning new meanings about our every day experiences. Reflective practices are generally less concerned with the question of "what cognitive processes are operating," but more with the interplay of the individual and influential social forces.² But there is no clear way to determine at any point whether we are being driven by "false consciousness," or by what Foucault's early authorship was concerned with—the ways in which *external authority* shapes the structure of the mind (Lacan, 1977). Nor is it always clear what one's "true" interests might be—a primary goal of reflection. Boud and Walker (1992) suggest, however, that this uncertainty does not mean the concept of reflection is useless. They argue that it serves to promote a healthy mood of inquiry which can enhance transformative action for individuals, groups, and social action movements.

² Boud and Walker (1992) distinguish reflection and critical reflection by identifying the presuppositions of "critical" reflection. It is precisely this interplay of the person with social forces which is central to these presuppositions.

This linking of reflection to "transformation" is important to mainstream theories of experiential learning (for instance Jack Mezirow tends to emphasize intentionality, agency, and reflexivity in the transformation of one's "meaning perspectives"). Indeed, experiential adult education has always implicitly recognized that learning does not entail "teaching" or transmitting a body of knowledge to a passive learner—"knowledge is something created in the learning process where teachers, learners, bodies of knowledge, and experiential meanings interact" (Usher, 1992, p. 211). In this process Usher is asserting that all parties to the transaction are affected, and to varying degrees, "transformed."

What has tended to remain unaddressed in the discourse of experiential learning is the **ethical questions** about whether emancipatory intent and so-called "liberating" reform processes do not merely lead to other forms of control. For example, what are the real goals of empowerment underlying learning at work? Greater efficiency? Productivity gains? Enlightenment? Just what are the ethics of "other directed" experiential learning activities? In organizations, such ethics relate directly to the purposes and practices of strategic personnel such as trainers, line-managers, "mentors," and so on, who set up activities to be "experiential." A serious consideration of the ethics of "other directed" experiential learning events at work is relatively undeveloped in the literature. But it can be argued that experiential learning in organizations, defined in often well-intentioned humanistic terms, can be (ultimately) disabling rather than enabling—though most trainers would most likely dispute this. They would dispute this partly because such an analysis can have demoralizing affects. For instance, recent empirical work on training practices in multinationals (Boje, 1994; Casey, 1995; Coulter and Goodson, 1992) suggests the new corporate language of "enabling," "self-direction," "team-work," and "learning organizations" embodies subtle forms of discursive control. Workers are no more "empowered" than before, but they are, in effect, required to work longer hours and become more efficient.

Ontological assumptions about organizations—the "authentic" settings prized by the research referred to earlier—are thus important to a coherent theory of experiential learning. For Greenfield, organizational administration "is not objective, but a social phenomena, subjective in nature...organizational reality, as experienced, is thus like a cultural artefact" (in Evers and Lakomski, 1991, p. 96). This artefact presents one of the classic paradoxes for educational thought, and is cleverly depicted by Collingwood, who draws on Aristotle's analysis of causation:

To create something means to make it non-technically, but yet consciously and voluntarily...it should be clear that when we speak of an artist making a poem, or a play, or a painting, or a piece of music, the kind of making to which we refer is the kind we call creating... These things are not made as a means to an end, they are not made to any preconceived plan, they are not made by imposing form on a given matter. Yet they are made deliberately and responsibly, by people who know what they are doing, even though they do not know in advance what is going to become of it. (Collingwood in Beckett, 1992, p. 140)

The paradox centers on the significance invested in "human dynamism" and the consequent philosophical constructs which, in turn, have become hierarchies of knowledge. It is precisely the hierarchical constructions of knowledge which gives rise to dualisms such as theory and practice, thinking and doing, facts and values, mind and body. These dualisms, says Hager (1989, p. 22), fail to recognize our common integrative experience which makes sense of life.

Thus far I have discussed informal learning in terms of its location under the theoretical umbrella of experiential learning. Some of the principal assumptions of experiential learning have been examined including the primacy of individual autonomy, the humanistic (liberal) conception of empowerment of the person, and the centrality of reflection in using experience for learning. It has been argued that knowledge acquired from experience is far from unproblematic and that much of the current research represents "experience" unreflexively.³ That is, it tends not to acknowledge the ways in which research theory frames its own conception of experience through its language and its assumptions. In turn this can lead to ethical dilemmas.

It has been further argued that the assumptions about the status of the so-called "authentic settings" which figure prominently in linking workplace learning and education, need to be constantly questioned. Yet it is precisely the engagement in the everyday which is so important to informal learning. Subjective "everyday" experience contains innumerable normative interpretations of "reality"—the "common sense" used by trainers to inform their practice. Trainers frequently use "*common sense*;" as Berger and Luckman put it, "the reality par excellence" (1981, p. 35). In this political reality the everyday appears already objectified, ordered by a variety of cultural instructions as to how things should be done, involving a complex of personal and social values.

The Politics of Learning From Experience

This section clarifies some of the ideologies and values which underpin the politics of learning from experience within contemporary workplaces. This is not going to be turned into a political-science treatise, but the tensions between the values of individual trainers and the ideologies of their workplaces require some scrutiny. The purposes of what one does at work are vital to one's informal learning. The effects of corporate philosophy upon what one does raises questions such as—what is particularly meaningful to workplace trainers, and why? What sorts of practice are most rewarding or intrinsically worthwhile to them, and what conditions tend to promote such practices? Candy suggests that adult educators have theoretical orientations in their everyday practices whether they realize this

³ "The ultimate goal of a reflexive sociology is the deepening of the sociologist's own awareness, of who and what he [sic] is, in a specific society at any given time, and of how both his social role and personal praxis affect his work as a sociologist...it also requires a persistent commitment to the value of that awareness which expresses itself through all stages of the work (*research*), as well as the auxiliary skills or arrangements that will enable the sociologist's self to be open to hostile information" (Miller, 1989, p. 30).

explicitly or not (1991). Knowles (1980) simply asks whether the practitioner's orientation is "andragogical" or "pedagogical".

Zinn (1983) goes a step further, locating practice within five prevailing adult education philosophies: Liberal, Behaviourist, Progressive, Humanist and Radical. Usher (1992) adds a post-modern perspective which is explored elsewhere in the article. Rather than expand here the values underpinning these philosophies (George and Wilding, 1985; Gunnarson, Knocke, and Westburg, 1991; to an extent, Newman, 1993; and Zinn, 1983; do this), the tensions for adult educators practicing in organizational contexts are explored. Brookfield (1991), identifies four particular areas of tension for adult educators:

1. The connection between the educator's making explicit a political commitment and the encouragement of critical thinking in learners.
2. The extent to which conceptualizations of critical thinking and models by which it can be taught should be grounded within one exclusive intellectual tradition.
3. How to develop a language in critical thinking that is accessible to those adults whom the process is designed to assist.
4. The need to balance inspiring a sense of possibility that thinking critically entails with a realistic assessment of the risks and dangers it involves.

A degree of conflict and struggle exists within each of these points as they apply to trainers' practices. Indeed the experience of some conflict and ethical dilemmas is central to aspects of informal learning, prompting Foley to state that "it is far too cosy to simply appreciate the [ideological] traditions which accompany the different 'villages' of adult education...that a critical consciousness" is essential to learning (1993, p. 33). He draws on Skeggs to make the point that:

[Such a] consciousness...is not marked by a simple progression from one position of subjectivity to another. Rather it is characterized by an oscillation between moments of relative incoherence, the breaking up of old political languages and positions, and moments when new formulations, often tentative and transitory, are being realized. (1991, in Foley, 1993, p. 33)

Underlying the above tensions are the beliefs, convictions, and values one holds and how these relate to what one actually has to do at work. To begin to understand the tensions, one must be consciously aware of the factors influencing them. Brookfield describes how critical thinking and self-reflexivity are important to understanding the influential factors upon individuals at work and the strategies used to deal with every day tensions and dilemmas (1991). He cites writers such as Carr and Kemmis (1983), Usher and Bryant (1989), and Usher (1989) to indicate that:

The distinction between a practical discussion and formal theoretical discussion is somewhat spurious and demands a critical self-reflexivity to clarify what we are bringing to the discussion ourselves. (Brookfield, 1991, p. 1)

Precision about "what we are bringing to the discussion ourselves" is problematic however. There are multiple perspectives on this. For instance, critical thinking is, to some developmental psychologists:

An empirical description referring to a discernible set of post-formal cognitive operations; to neo-Freudians it is the means by which we become aware of the assumptive clusters etched into our conscious, and by which we discern the inequities in the economic substructure of moral codes, beliefs systems and artistic forms. (Brookfield, 1991, p. 3)

Whereas postmodernists argue that subjects are not actually meaning-givers but **meaning-takers** "where the meaning of experience is not conferred exclusively or authentically by individuals...with the place of language a key issue" (Usher, Bryant, and Johnston, in press). The point here about these multiple perspectives is nicely expressed by Kemmis, who supports calls for greater self-reflexivity in research and reflection-in-action, but reminds us that reflection is not a purely internal psychological process, but action oriented and historically embedded; "like language, it is a social process and as such is political and shaped by ideology" (1985, p. 143).

Personal meaning and ideology at work. If learning is to be considered a meaningful workplace purpose, an examination of the values held by individuals and how such values sometimes clash with those of their workplaces is essential. This section thus briefly explores the links between macro-level ideological influences and the individuals' personal values. It is argued that without explicit attention to these linkages, workplace learning will essentially reproduce the dominant values trainers sometimes purport to challenge.

Thorpe suggests that ideology is often used as a political 'ism'; that is:

A person's or group's general social and political world view, as encapsulated in the various political philosophies, like liberalism, capitalism, Fabianism, socialism and so on. [Such philosophies] offer their adherents cogent [but different] explanations of the causes and nature of social problems, and provide blueprints for social and political change, according to the principles valued most highly by each particular 'ism' (1985, p. 69).

The grand theories can therefore give rise to significant clashes between personal perspectives and work requirements. For instance in the way industry trainers are required to respond to organizational change, aspects of "downsizing," corporate image-making and so on. The alignment (or misalignment) of trainers' work contexts with the individuals' values is a critical ingredient of the tensions and ethical dilemmas experienced. Where one stands in relation to the broad ideologies is therefore extremely important to informal learning.

It is critical thinking and critical reflection, according to Brookfield, which can help. He defines critical thinking as:

A process that helps people to judge the extent to which their values are fair and just, or serving to strengthen the position of powerful minority groups... critical reflection is a process which requires fundamental challenges to conventional wisdom and taken-for-granted norms about what people expect from each other. (1991, p. 2)

A worry Brookfield has about these processes is that "critical thinking can lead to the adoption of a certain ideological outlook, a certain ideological commitment, or a belief in the correctness of a particular political ideology" (1991, p. 3). His argument is that the success of an educational idea often rests upon "conceptual malleability" and its wider interpretive latitude. In other words remaining open to and critical of alternate ideological perspectives. But this argument itself represents a political position—in the liberal, progressive tradition of adult education. This is a position rejected by those with stronger socialist leanings on the grounds that it is linked to structural forces which maintain unequal distributions of power in society.

The tension in this debate raises many questions related to the roles and purposes of adult education generally, and of industry trainers in particular. "Meaningfulness" is not always "conceptually malleable," and the requirements of workplaces can, at times, fully test one's ideological resolve. If those adopting a conceptually malleable position run the risk of being uncommitted to anything (pragmatic), or at worst untrustworthy tools of management, the "ideologically committed" run the risk of an inflexibility, or a dogma, which can in itself lead to a new form of oppression.

An illustration of how this binary can work is provided by Usher. He claims that a central problem with a critical pedagogy is that it is itself a part of a discourse which counters individualism by theorizing "the subject" as a construction rather than an originary point. This subject is generally regarded as an exploited subject of "false-consciousness." Such an exploited subject has his or her "experience rendered unauthentic by distorting ideology and oppressive social structures" (Usher, 1992, p. 203). For experiential learning theorists such as Brookfield who hope that critical reflection will help resolve this binary, Kemmis' assertion "that reflection is a political act which either hastens or defers the realization of a more rational, just and fulfilling society" (1985, p. 140) will not be reassuring. It will not be reassuring because difficulties exist in becoming "critical." Reflection—a centerpiece of learners' constructing their own experience—is in reality a "political act."

Underlying this point about the political grounds of reflection is a central tenet of critical theory—the critique of instrumental reason (Habermas, 1971). "Reason" here is viewed as governing dominant social science through which society understands itself and by which it legitimates its oppressive economic, political, and social practices. For critical social theory, "subjectivity" is not the rational individual, but shaped socially—by structural and political forces. A powerful theory, but involving the binary of individual agency versus social construction. Schön points out that such a theoretical binary creates dilemmas for the professional of today in that "both ends of the gap one is expected to bridge with one's profession are changing so rapidly: the body of knowledge that must be used, and the expectations of the society one must serve" (1983, p. 15).

Indeed, the gap one is expected to bridge and the expectations of the society "one must serve" include the drive for increasingly competitive workplaces. To aid

competitiveness, Skruber (among many others)⁴ reports findings from 50 case studies of "bureaucratic organizations" that:

A heightened sense of awareness [amongst workers] about the nature of their organization, such as how they worked, what was possible, what was not and why, provided a sense of control and a diminishing of the 'victim' syndrome which can afflict many workers in bureaucratic environments. (Skruber in Marsick, 1987, p. 74).

This "worker empowerment," to which informal learning is integrally connected, is said to lead to improved productivity and worker satisfaction (Kornbluh and Greene, 1989; Marsick and Watkins, 1990). This is precisely why many organizations have, over the past few years, attempted to introduce reforms based on notions such as "the learning company," "learning organization," and "quality circles." Many adult education providers have been active in promoting such concepts, often "taking up" in vogue notions, without calling into question the underlying values and epistemologies such notions can represent. Such notions, particularly in contexts of profit maximization, can simply become the new forms of "strategic" control (Hart, 1993). This control, in turn, has deep ethical and epistemological connotations related to the purposes of the trainer's practice, conceptions of the "workers' interests," "company good," "fairness," and what constitutes "ethical profit." As Beckett points out, "in any one unit of practice, say, a consultation, or a lesson, or a visit, there is a rich array of values such as confidentiality, respect, discretion, accountability and so on" (1993, p. 5). It is precisely the values one holds in practice which will bring trainers face to face with dilemmas such as "who owns the trainer?" And "what ought one to do when faced with dilemmas of allegiance?"

What we need, suggests Foley, are "analyses which take account of the specific social contexts of adult learning and which treat all aspects of adult learning as *socially constructed* and problematic" (1993, p. 22). A problem with this critical social theory however, argues Usher, is that:

It is itself part of a discourse which constructs an alternative version of subjectivity—whereby its subject tends to be the exploited subject of "false consciousness," deprived of agency and posited as a social victim. In effect this reverses the privileged position of the individual in the humanistic discourse of experiential learning by privileging the social. (1992, p. 203)

Usher points out that the weakness in this reversal is that without some sense of agency and "a notion of a contested and always 'in process' subjectivity, social empowerment easily becomes oppression in another guise" (1992, p. 203). He argues that such a notion can be found in postmodern critiques of experiential learning. The following section therefore highlights some of the main standpoints of postmodernism in relation to the practice of adult education and training. These

⁴ The journal, magazine, and newspaper articles taking up the theme of promoting workplaces as "learning environments" are too numerous to recount. For an excellent critique of the current debate on work and education, however, see Hart, 1993.

highlights do not, of course, represent a full review of postmodernist literature, although "postmodern doubts and truths about industry training" are examined elsewhere (see Garrick, 1994).

Postmodern Standpoints on Informal Learning

Trends of interdisciplinarity and experiential approaches to teaching and learning can be seen as changes taking place under the impact of the postmodern and therefore very much part of it. In other words, there is no uniform, unified postmodern discourse of education. However, it is through these [types of] changes that the Enlightenment tradition and the place of education within it is increasingly questioned, exposing the certainties and "warranted" claims of educational theories and practice to a critical examination, a shaking of the foundations. (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p. 25)

This quote represents several features of a postmodern standpoint on informal learning: interdisciplinarity and experiential approaches, the impact of postmodern conditions, no unified or uniform postmodern discourse of education, the notion of discourse itself, the questioning of the Enlightenment tradition, and the shaking of the "foundations" of truth claims in the theory and the practices of adult education. Indeed, "postmodernism" is not a specific theoretical position itself, but an intellectual trend that comprises several quite different theoretical or philosophical theories. These theories are particularly indebted to the continental philosophers Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Lyotard, and Baudrillard. More recently, their writings have been applied to the philosophy of education by Lather (1991), Usher (1992), Usher and Edwards (1994), Boje (1994), and Burbules (1995).

The application of a postmodern critique of education can be summarized in this way:

Postmodernism is said to be the rejection of the Enlightenment; it is about the infusion of power into our theories of knowledge, language and ethics; it is antirationalistic; it offers a radical social constructivism; it privileges difference over commonality; it is the discursive constitution of social (and natural) reality; it stresses a decentered view of the subject and the fungibility of identity and so on. (Burbules, 1995, p. 2)

But such a neat summary (as Burbules acknowledges) is precisely that—too neat.

Each of the foregoing writers has different stances on each of these claims, which has given rise to the damning criticism that postmodernism is too relativistic (Himmelfarb, 1994; Mestrovic, 1991; and Mongardini, 1990). Indeed, Mongardini goes as far as to argue that postmodernism is:

The last ideology adopted by modernity to save itself... Like it or not, postmodernism marks the end of the old order. Postmodernism aestheticises modernity's unqualified glorification of change, the engine of an economic mentality and values that Marxism did not annihilate. The effect is to continue modernity's economic and rationalistic reduction of culture to privatism, fragmentation, and neo-romantic exaltation of momentary experience. What is lost finally is not only the individual to the "fetishism of objects," but also the

moral passions, religion, solidarity...and a spiritual culture, life-giving tendencies, and symbolic structures...to a rationalism that has become excessively abstract, but in itself does not produce anything more than primitive forms of fantasy, magic, regression, and negation of history. (1990, p. 53)

Mongardini argues that "postmodernism is the 'last ideology of modernism' that maintains modernism's values, *but incoherently*, and generates a crisis of identity which passes from the level of the individual to the entire culture" (1990, p. 53). This criticism may be rather hard on the foregoing writers however. Foucault, for instance does say that wherever there is power there is also resistance and that there is no one monolithic discourse. Postmodern theorists claim that it is useful to retain an open-ness to "knowing," as there is always the possibility that ideology will lead up the road towards "false-consciousness"-and that must suppose a "true" consciousness-which takes you back to foundationalism and authentic selves.⁵

It is precisely this *openness* to knowing which is a central standpoint of postmodernism. This standpoint in relation to informal learning assumes engagement among persons and between persons, and the adoption of certain stances without fully endorsing them. A postmodern position would thus hold that educators and trainers should not take themselves too seriously. Such a "partial" standpoint is the feature of postmodernism that particularly upsets those committed to socialist or contemporary Marxist positions in adult education.⁶ This theoretical conflict between critical social theory and postmodernism is addressed by Anyon, who asserts that there has been "a retreat of Marxism and socialist feminism in the face of postmodern and poststructural theories in education" (1994, p. 115). She refers to writers such as Aronowitz and Giroux (1991), Cherryholmes (1988), and Ellsworth (1989), amongst others, who claim that "Marxist thought has failed to develop and has been largely abandoned by critical scholars, many of whom now seek empowerment...through postmodern and poststructural ideas" (Anyon, 1994, p. 115).

Anyon's perspective is particularly interesting because of her personal history as a Feminist-Marxist contributor in the early 1980s.⁷ She points out that a binary opposition (of Marxism to postmodernism) does not aid the struggles for a more equitable society. It is not particularly helpful in the sense that the idea of opposition between worker and capitalist contains a limiting and critically useless binary-"which to some scholars has become the quaint remnants of the Marxist metanarrative" (1994, p. 116). She is also critical of aspects of postmodernism. She

⁵ I am indebted to Dr. Robin Usher (University of Southampton, England) for this comment (personal communication, November 1994).

⁶ See Michael Welton's *In Defense of the Life World* (1995) for an elaboration of the theoretical conflict between critical social theory and postmodernism.

⁷ Anyon's 1983 influential analysis focused on a critical theory of accommodation and resistance, public/private discrepancies, gender, class, and the contradictions of modern living.

argues that there is an often obscured metanarrative of postmodernism which describes a universal Truth:

This is a metanarrative of indeterminacy; a metanarrative about the **certainty of uncertainty**. Arguing that meaning is always indeterminate seems no less a deterministic and universalizing view than the Enlightenment narratives such as the orthodox Marxist view in which capitalists are "always" expropriators, and workers "always" righteous. (1994, p. 122)

She concludes that an essential characteristic of a socially useful theory (i.e., one which helps in the fight for a better world) is that the theoretical recommendations put forward must be capable of enactment. Thus "a theory that urges the integration of theory and practice must develop types of praxis that exemplify this: a theory that urges, as does Marxism, the end of oppression, must not oppress others" (Anyon, 1994, p. 129). This elevation of praxis as a tenet of "social usefulness" returns me to the notion of the "villages" of experiential learning referred to earlier. Praxis is fundamental to the villages and this, of course, is not without some post-modern concerns.

Praxis and the villages of experiential learning. Earlier in this article I referred to the four "villages" of experiential learning (Weil and McGill, 1989). To briefly recapitulate, the first is concerned with the assessment and accreditation of experiential learning as an alternative approach to traditional procedures. The second focuses on the organization of institutional change. In the third village, consciousness raising and community action are emphasized. The fourth village relates to personal growth and development. Underpinning the villages is a conception of experiential learning as a process:

Whereby people individually and in association with others, engage in direct encounter and then purposefully reflect upon, validate, transform, give meaning to, and seek to integrate their different ways of knowing. (Weil and McGill, 1989, p. 248)

Jansen and Wildemeersch (1992) point out that a number of problems exist with this conception. First, there is the issue of "the integration of different ways of knowing" (p. 6). They assert that for any "framework of understanding to transcend the mere exchange of everyday experiences a balanced combination of informal theories (taken for granted understandings of reality) and formal theories seems necessary" (p. 6). They are concerned that the villages do not adequately address this "balanced combination". For instance, the conceptual pathways within and between the villages are relatively undeveloped. This leaves the notion of experiential learning as a collection of ideological standpoints rather than a coherent theory.

Second, a concern of postmodern philosophy about the villages is the assumption (of experiential learning theory) that people actively give personal meaning to reality. Jansen and Wildemeersch argue that "subjects are not the authors of their own 'texts,' but their identities are being constituted and reconstituted by the forms of life, the lifeworlds or linguistic contexts in which they find themselves" (1992, p. 6).

The third concern is with community action and social transformation (the third village). Such terms, claims Giroux (1992), have become increasingly problematic. Radical frameworks have become increasingly fragmented and the language of possibility has been replaced the language of despair. As Acker, Barry, and Esseveld (1983), and Ellsworth (1989) point out, an emancipatory intent is no guarantee of an emancipatory outcome. This gulf between intents and outcomes is further articulated by Lather as a consequence of the "enactment of power relations, with research practices as more inscriptions of legitimation than procedures that help us get closer to some 'truth' that is captured by language" (1991, p. 14). The implication of this for practice is that research needs to continually demystify the reality of its own practice, or as Edwards and Usher (1993) suggest, texts are always open to challenge.

These postmodern concerns about "orthodox" theorizations of experiential learning highlight the importance of the views one holds on "objectivity" and "subjectivity." This will depend substantially on one's philosophical and epistemological grounding in what it means "to know." This is precisely where Foucault has become a leading theorist for postmodern philosophers. For Foucault:

Truth isn't outside power or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth. Its "general politics" of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts is true. (1988, p. 131)

An important postmodern standpoint derived from Foucault is the realization that certain dynamics of asymmetrical power which distort and compromise even the best of human intentions are inherent to institutional and informal patterns of life in which people are engaged. In the current world, Burbules points out that "technical systems of surveillance, manipulation, and control are increasingly widespread and subtle. We inevitably participate in these, consciously or unconsciously, nearly all the time" (1995, p. 6). The main problem with the villages is therefore that all their theorizations of experience, despite their differences, fail to adequately recognize that they are theorizing experience and that such theorizations discursively reproduce power relations. Even with an emancipatory intent, they can end up having oppressive effects.

Burbules (drawing upon Derrida) argues that such limits to good intentions is also concerned with language, and the particular way in which discourse-language in use-colors and shapes our ways of living and being in the world:

Our practices of communication, explanation, justification, truth-telling and so on are always partly expressions of the particular language or languages we have. But because our languages are diverse and non-congruent, there will

always be a limit upon any particular discursive system as a standpoint, in a place and time, within which one can try to describe all matters of truth, value and so forth; such matters will always be to some extent the expressions of *this* language, and *this* place and time. (1995, p. 6)

This article has highlighted key conceptual assumptions about experiential learning. This overview of theory and practice-related positions is, by definition, not all-encompassing. For instance, a reconstructive postmodernism (in which some of the valuable insights of critical social theory are not "simply" deconstructed) requires more theoretical development. And more empirical research and analyses from postmodern perspectives—such as Boje (1994) and Burbules and Rice (1991)—will help further inform the practices of adult education and training. For instance, there is a need to put the stories of management on one side of the page and the excluded stories of the workers and exploited others on the other. There is a need to compare management texts with ecological texts. And an exciting research topic is the ways people resist the hidden curricula of organizational learning. As Boje puts it, there is an urgent need to "study the storytelling process [in organizations] to reveal the subtle ways in which capitalist learning occurs" (1994, p. 456).

For the moment, I have suggested that contemporary conceptualizations of informal learning tend to locate it under the broader notion of experiential learning. Experiential learning, as exemplified through the villages, has been shown to have an important philosophic role in bringing together (as a core concept) various approaches to "experience." Indeed, the philosophies of experience-based learning are now being applied to work contexts and, as Hart points out, the "current debate on work and education contains suggestions that are important and useful" (1993, p. 33). For instance the "marshaling" of informal learning contains potential for the experience of some marginalized groups to be formally recognized and accredited. But this philosophic role is not without postmodern problems. The influential standpoints of postmodernism in relation to "the subject," autonomy, gender, local "conditions," language and discourse, power/knowledge, and the relationship of knowledge and experience tell us that, as Foucault suggests, "the theory generated thus far is not indispensable...the task of 'truth' is now linked to the challenging of taboos" (1990, p. 130). Based on this reading, one would need to be deeply skeptical of the ultimate purposes of structuring and "using" informal learning—irrespective of the village to which one believes (or at least feels) he or she belongs.

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