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The Philosophy and Theory of Experiential Education: An Introduction

A short overview of the most important educational philosophies, learning theories and leading theorists/practioners, that have laid the fundamentals of Experiential Learning, as it is practiced by the partnership of Via Experientia: the International Academy of Experiential Education.

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The Philosophy and Theory of Experiential learning

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What?

The aim of this text is to give a short overview of the most important educational philosophies, learning theories and leading theorists/practioners, that have laid the fundamentals of Experiential Learning as it is practiced by the partnership of Via Experientia: The International Academy of Experiential Education.

This is not an expert treatise on the roots of experiential learning, but an attempt to provide the participants of Via Experientia with some background material and hopefully a deeper understanding of the subject matter of this training course, ie experiential learning.

We are aware that producing a historical map of this kind holds some dangers, especially of over-simplification or taking too much previous knowledge for granted, but we feel it is important to try to give an overview that helps to clarify and situate where we come from.

This is not something that is done often in the experiential learning field; often practitioners even reject any notion of looking at theories as it might get in the way of developing their intuition or reflecting on their own practice. As we know from Bateson, the map is not the territory – but it's great to have one to help you look around.

Admittedly there is also a personal reason for writing this text. Being a student of experiential learning myself for over twenty years, I still have a need to know more and to learn more about it. This project offered an opportunity to study more and to try to write a text that could be educative for others - so I took it! In the end it is about my own meaning-making and hopefully it helps yours, too.

Experiential learning has to a large degree existed outside of the formal education system and been seen as belonging to the non- and in-formal educational domains. The dominant view in

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formal education has been to teach and educate learners in certain disciplines of knowledge and to expose them to what convention has decided that they need to know. The teacher has access to the knowledge and brings it to learners that need to be educated. This planned knowledge transfer or education takes place in programmes, institutions and classrooms, and is legitimate and officially accredited.

This notion, i.e. teaching learners what society decides they should know, might apply to young learners having less experience and the type of memory that allows them to store knowledge that is not connected to their experience. Today there is a general agreement that this approach does not apply in the same degree to adult learners, because *how* we remember changes with age. Adult learners have gained a great many experiences throughout their whole lives and have the kind of memory that needs to connect new knowledge to prior knowledge or experiences, so as to be able to construct new knowledge.

The participants of Via Experientia are indeed adults, with different kinds of formal education and personal/cultural contexts, but they have in common that they are grown-up and they have long years of life experiences. This is why this text is written from the viewpoint of adult education.

I Where does the partnership of Via Experientia come from within Experiential Learning?

The members of the partnership of Via Experientia have all been working for several years strongly influenced by the philosophy and approach of experiential learning, which in many ways is derived from the Outward Bound school of thought. It is by no means our only source of theory and approach, but it is a very significant one. To continue with the metaphor of the map and territory, Outward Bound – Belgium has been our “you are here”, the red dot on the map of theories and approaches, and our starting point for journeys into the territory of practice.

Many of the philosophies and theories covered in this text are already incorporated into the practice of the Outward Bound schools and experiential educators. And we, the members of this partnership have been applying them in our practice, without being overly occupied with the development of philosophy and theory, but nevertheless our practice is built on those foundations.

A detailed description of and research on one of our earlier training projects, “Madzinga: Intercultural via Experiential Learning and Outdoor Education, - LTTC” (1) has been published as web-book: www.outwardbound.be/madzinga The Madzinga publication is an important window into the practice of this partnership in the past and interesting evidence of the intercultural learning that takes place in such a training.

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Coming back to the Outward Bound movement; it has its roots in the progressive tradition, which was later enriched by humanism and other theories, and most recently by Positive Psychology. It has been a powerful force in adventure education and experiential learning since before the middle of the 20th century and is now operating more than 70 schools in over 40 countries. The Outward Bound movement developed from the thought and practice of Kurt Hahn.

Kurt Hahn was born in Germany 1886 and educated in Berlin and at Oxford. In 1920 he established the Salem School in Germany with a commitment to train his pupils to develop moral independence, a strong sense of values and to improve physical health. In 1932 he was imprisoned by the Nazi regime, but later he was released and went into exile to Britain. In 1934 he founded a school in Gordonstoun, UK, which later led to the establishment of the Outward Bound Sea School in Aberdovey, UK, in 1946.

The philosophy of Kurt Hahn has been a major influence on the field of adventure education and he is among the more innovative educators of the 20th century. Hahn was always more concerned with what kind of individuals his schools produced, than which kind of academic accomplishment they could show. The purpose of education, from his viewpoint, was to develop the righteous and active citizen, with a strong emphasis on leadership and service. He identified the ills of his time, and many of them are still on the “top ten list” of the ills of the modern society. He said that the decline of compassion was to do with the “unseemly haste with which modern life is conducted”. Today it seems that the haste of society is far more intense than it was around the middle of the 20th century. Thomas James has written insightfully about Hahn’s work and he says:

Part of his life-long aspiration, part of the “whole”, he sought through programmes like Outward Bound, was the experience accessible to any human being, at any level of ability, could be charged with joy and wonder in doing. But the corollary is that he saw the adventure, in a social perspective, as an event of community life and not a private thrill. The adventure of the individual is always mediated to some extent by the values and needs of the group.

Kurt Hahn was the founder and philosopher behind the creation of the Outward Bound schools and the programme of the Outward Bound Schools is founded on a number of assumptions. In the Outward Bound Instructor’s field manual, the following is outlined:
On a philosophical level, it assumes that:

- ... one reveres life for having experienced it in a real, dramatic terms.
- ... from such experience one learns to respect the self.
- ... from respect of self flows compassion for others.
- ... compassion for others is best expressed in the service to mankind.

II Background and dimensions of experiential learning, as a theory and practice in experiential learning

It can be said that anyone who acts is guided by some sort of theory or philosophy. We act for reasons, good or bad, and generally have some understanding of what we are doing, why we are doing it in the way we do and the consequences of our actions. This is common sense in the ordinary course of human activities, it is related to philosophy but can be distinguished from it. Philosophy is a more reflective and systematic activity than common sense and inspires one's activities and gives direction to practice.

It may also be said that philosophy can be clarified by practice and practice can be illuminated by theory, and all philosophies of adult education deal with the relationship between theory and practice.

Below are very, very short descriptions of the major philosophies of adult education that have been developed over the last century. All of them are about experience as such, as just the act of living includes experience, but not all of them are concerned with experiential learning.

An overview of philosophies of adult education in the twentieth century

Liberal Adult Education

The emphasis in this tradition is upon liberal learning, that is organized in a set of disciplines, rationally organized knowledge and the development of the intellectual powers of the mind. The educative task is to lead persons from information to knowledge to wisdom, ie toward conceptual and theoretical understanding rather than mere transmission of factual knowledge or development of technical skills. It puts a great emphasis on learning from the classics and the standard liberal arts, i.e. language, literature, fine arts; mathematics, natural science; history, geography and social studies.

Progressive Adult Education

The emphasis in this tradition is on such concepts as the relationship between education and society, experience centred, vocational and democratic education. Focusing on needs and interests of learners, the scientific method, problem-solving methods, the centrality of experience, pragmatic and utilitarian goals and the idea of social responsibility.

Behaviour Adult Education

The emphasis in this tradition is on concepts such as control, behavioural modification, learning through reinforcement and management by objectives. The intellect, feelings, emotions and a person's "inner" life are not observable or measurable and therefore not investigated.

Humanistic Adult Education

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The emphasis in this tradition is on key concepts like freedom and autonomy, trust, active cooperation and participation, and self-directed learning. Striving for growth, self-actualization and realizing the individual's unique potentials.

Radical or critical Adult Education

The emphasis in this tradition is on education as a force for achieving radical social change. It includes various forms of Marxist analysis, critical - and feminist theory.

Analytic Philosophy of Adult Education

The emphasis in this tradition is on the need for clarifying concepts, arguments, and policy statements used in adult education. Analysis of language and the reality to which language corresponds has been one of the chief tasks of analytic philosophers.

Postmodern Adult Education

The emphasis in this tradition is based on philosophic questioning of such fundamental concepts as truth, theory, reality, knowledge and power. One of the main premises of postmodernism is that the second half of the twentieth century marked the end of the modern period in art, architecture, literature, science, philosophy, theology, media, and popular culture.

Of the philosophical traditions mentioned above the Progressive, the Humanistic and the Radical traditions have had the greatest influence on experiential learning and can be considered to be the philosophical foundations of experiential learning. They have in common that they are based on "reflection on concrete experience".

The Progressive movement challenged the traditional liberal education when educators began to replace tradition, faith and authority with reason, experience and feeling, as ways to arrive at truth and values. Focusing on the individual's responsibility toward their society and viewing education as a problem-solving instrument of social and political reform.

The Humanistic movement holds sacred the dignity and autonomy of human beings and is concerned with the development of the whole person. Focusing on the learner at the center of a process of discovery and self-actualisation, in a drive toward personal enrichment, integration and psychological development.

Radical and critical traditions are concerned with challenging the status quo, taken-for-granted assumptions and power relationships, and have liberation, empowerment and transformation as key components. Focusing on societal and individual liberation through questioning and re-interpreting the very cultural assumptions of experience, and moving to action for transformation.

The problem with defining experiential learning as a philosophy and as an educational practice lies in the fact that there is no living nor learning without experiencing. This means we have to ask ourselves the question: How is it possible to separate experiential learning from other learning experiences?

The nature of experience

It should be obvious (although the notion of "obvious" is never obvious in intercultural contexts!!) that just as there are many philosophies and many theories of learning, there are different schools of thought regarding the nature of experiential learning. These schools of thought or traditions have different ways of understanding the nature of experience and how it is related to learning. Järvinen (1) has categorized three traditions as the main perspectives, based on their understanding of what knowledge is, how it is constructed, how to view what he calls "knowers", and finally, how knowers are related to their context.

1. *The Phenomenological tradition* (Boyd and Schön) which analyzes emotional states, suggesting that reflection begins by analyzing the learner's way of observing, communicating, thinking and acting.
2. *The Critical Theory tradition* (Habermas, Mezirow and Freiere) views critical self-reflection as a central element of adult learning and development, with the aim of experiential learning being to correct political and social factors that limit the learner's development.
3. *The Situated and Action Theory* traditions of situated cognition and enactivism stress the role of cultural action and its analysis, criticizing those who divorce the concept of experience from its socio-historical roots.

The table below is useful to illustrate how important dimensions, such as the type and role of experience in the learner's life are understood differently in various educational orientations. The three orientations here presume the same basic conceptualization of experiential learning:

An independent learner, cognitively reflecting on concrete experience to construct new understandings (perhaps with the assistance of an educator) toward some social goal of progress or improve-ment.

Educators might find that they can situate their personal understanding and practice of experiential learning with these distinctions.

Table 1: How important dimensions, such as the type and role of experience in the learner’s life, are understood differently in various educational orientations:

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

Source: Saddington T. „Exploring the Roots and Branches of Experiential Learning“. Lifelong Learning in Europe 3, no. 3 (1998), p 134. Reprinted without permission.

In the table above Saddington builds on the *4 villages of educational purpose (2)* to show how three different dimensions of experiential learning, Progressive, Humanist and Radical, come together with adult education practice.

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The four villages or forms of educational practice are the following:

- 1st Village:* Accrediting learning derived from experience for purpose of entry to educational progression or employment.
- 2nd Village:* Using experiential learning to challenge higher and continuing education schools and curriculum.
- 3rd Village:* Focusing on social change.
- 4th Village:* Focusing on individual development.

Learning Orientations and Learning Theories

In their book “Learning in Adulthood” from 2007, Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner review and explore five orientations to learning, any of which might include numerous learning theories. These five here are chosen by them for their diversity and for their insights into learning in adulthood. The five orientations are:

The Behaviorist orientation, which defines learning as change in visible (overt) behavior; that is, a measurable response to stimuli in the environment. Findings from behavioral theories can often be seen in training and vocational adult education.

The Humanistic orientation, which emphasizes human nature, potential, emotions and effect. Learning is more than overt behavior and cognitive processes, it is strongly related to motivation and involves choice and responsibility.

The Cognitivist orientation, which focuses on internal mental processes and how the mind makes sense out of stimuli in the environment. This orientation is concerned with how information is processed, stored and retrieved, and how aging influences these processes.

The Social-Cognitivist orientation, has the focus on the social setting in which learning takes place and learning is a function of the interaction of the person, the environment and the behavior. It highlights the importance of social context and explains the processes of modeling and mentoring.

The Constructivist orientation, has the focus on how learners construct their own knowledge from their experience. Learning is a process of meaning-making both as a mental activity and a socially interactive interchange. Aspects of constructivism can be found in self-directed learning, transformational learning, experiential learning, situated cognition and reflective practice.

Table 2: Five Orientations to Learning

Aspect	Behaviorist	Humanist	Cognitivist	Social cognitive	Constructivist
Learning Theorist	Guthrie, Hull, Pavlov, Skinner, Thorndike, Tolman, Watson	Maslow, Rogers	Ausubel, Bruner, Gagne, Koffka, Kohler, Lewin, Piaget	Bandura, Rotter	Candy, Dewey, Lave, Piaget, Rogoff, von Glaserfeld, Vygotsky
View of the learning process	Change in behaviour	A personal act to fulfill development	Information processing (including insight, memory, perception, meta-cognition)	Interaction with and observation of others in a social context	Construction of meaning from experience
Locus of Learning	Stimuli in external environment	Affective and developmental needs	Internal cognitive structure	Interaction of person, behaviour, environment	Individual and social construction of knowledge
Purpose of Learning	To produce behavioural change in desired direction	To become self-actualized, mature, autonomous	To develop capacity and skills to learn better	To learn new roles and behaviours	To construct knowledge

Instructor's Role	Arrange environment to elicit desired response	Facilitate development of whole person	Structure content of learning activity	Model and guide new roles and behaviours	Facilitate and negotiate meaning-making with learner
Manifestation in adult education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *behavioural objectives *Accountability *Performance improvement *Skill development *HRD & training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Andragogy *Self-directed learning *Cognitive development *Transformational learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Learning how to learn *Social role acquisition *Intelligence, learning, & memory as related to age 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Socialization * Self-directed learning *Mentoring *Locus of control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Experiential learning *Transformational learning *Reflective practice *Communities of practice *Situated learning

Source: Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner; „Learning in Adulthood“, 3rd Ed. 2007: 295. Reprinted without permission.

III Constructivism – a reflection orientation

Constructivism, the dominant or prevalent understanding of experiential learning in adult education, is based on reflection.

The educational approach is a humanistic, learner-centred practice that assists learners in reflecting on their experience in order to construct new knowledge.

This means that the individual reflects on lived experience; interprets and generalizes this experience to form mental structures, ie knowledge, that is stored in memory as concepts that can be represented, expressed and transferred to new situations.

Constructivism has a long history where several thinkers and researchers have contributed to the theory with their different perspectives, but they share one central premise: *The learner is believed to construct, through reflection, a personal understanding of relevant structures of meaning derived from his or her action in the world.*

Learning through reflection on experience

John Dewey (1938),

challenged the reigning pedagogy and justified education based on learning by doing. He showed that individuals create new knowledge and transform themselves through a process of learning by performing new roles. He emphasized that not all experience educates. Dewey wrote that for learning to happen an experience must include two dimensions, continuity and interaction.

Continuity: The learner needs to be able to connect the new experience with his or her older experiences in a meaningful way.

Interaction: The learner needs to be actively interacting with his or her environment, testing out lessons developed in that environment.

Jean Piaget (1966),

described the construction of meaning through assimilation and accommodation.

Assimilation; occurs when individuals incorporate new objects of knowledge into their already existing personal building (construct) of the world.

Accommodation; is meant to happen when new experiences contradict older knowledge and a need for change occurs.

Piaget underlines that each individual is active in the learning process and each person may construct very different understandings after interacting with the same objects in the same environment.

Lev Vygotsky (1978),

emphasized the importance of an individual's interaction with "others" or the socio-cultural environment. He developed the theory of the "*zone of proximal development*", a time-bound

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site of community surrounding a person that through dialogue and reflection, can support or diminish a persons cognitive development.

Constructivist Models of Experiential Learning

David Kolb (1984),

tried to clarify how different people learn by integrating their concrete emotional experiences with reflection. Kolb believed that experiential learning is a tension and conflict-filled cyclical process and invented the model of the “*experiential learning cycle*” to explain, in four stages, how this learning takes place. New knowledge and skills are developed by confrontation among concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualizing followed by active experimentation. He also showed how four different learning styles are related to these stages. The stages or steps in the E.L.-cycle are:

First:

A learner lives through a *concrete experience*, which can either be a designed learning situation or a real life experience.

Second:

Time is taken for *reflective observation* of the experience where questions are posed to the experience, like: What happened and what was I aware of? What is the meaning of it all, etc?

Third:

The learner *generalizes* the insights gained from the reflections, addressing questions like: What does the experience say about me, others and/or different situations? How might it have been different?

Fourth:

The learner *applies* the new learnings or insights through active experimentation in similar and different situations, and revises the new learning in his or her construct of the world.

Kolb and several other theorists in this field maintain that, experience alone can not teach, it needs to be reflected and mentally processed to become meaningful and educative.

Kolb’s experiential learning cycle is probably the most widely used model in experiential education to work systematically with experience, and to derive learnings from it.

Boyd and Walker (1991),

presented a model of experiential learning similar to Kolb’s with two main additions. They addressed the influence of **context and intent** on the learning, that can be developed through reflection.

Context: Each educational setting or situation in life has a specific context and each individual or learner has a unique context of his own, in the sense that he or she has a unique life-story and life experiences, i.e. how individuals are “made of” their lives and prior experiences, and therefore individuals experience every common experience (common context) differently to each other. And they have different ideas and feelings that arise from these experiences.

Intent: The extent of our learning, according to Boyd and Walker, corresponds to the way we prepare for an experience; the noticing and intervening of our participation in the actual experience and the process we use to recall and evaluate an experience, and how we tend to the feelings the experience provoked. They claim that negative feelings, if not tended to, can block potential learning.

During a particular experience we each notice and intervene with the milieu according to our predispositions; we balance our observations with awareness of our own reactions; we choose ways to participate in the activity, respond to different events and deal with the unexpected – all by reflecting in action.

Afterwards we attend to our experience through four processes:

- 1) *Association* – relating new information to familiar concepts.
- 2) *Integration* – seeking connections between the new and old.
- 3) *Appropriation* – personalizing the new knowledge to make it our own, and finally by,
- 4) *Validation* – determining the authenticity of our new ideas and the feelings of the experience.

Donald Schön (1983; 1987),

has promoted constructivism to understand workplace learning. His view is that professionals live in a world of uncertainty, instability, complexity and value conflict, where they often must deal with problems for which no existing rules or theories from formal training or past experience apply. Schön was interested in how reflection and particularly critical reflection have a role in the ongoing learning of professionals in their work.

He says that when people engage in critical reflection, they question the way they framed the problem in the first place. And even if no apparent problem exists, the practitioner questions “taken for granted” situations, why are things as they are and why do events happen as they happen?

Schön proposes that practitioners learn by noticing and framing problems of interest to them in particular ways, then ask questions and experiment with solutions. When they experience surprise or discomfort in their everyday activity this reflective process begins. Their knowledge is constructed through reflection during and after some experimental action on the ill-defined and messy problems of practice.

When practitioners meet situations containing problems or elements of surprise they *reflect-in-action* by improvising, thinking and testing, and maybe, retesting solutions for the problem. Schön adds that practitioners also *reflect-on-action* after an event, to examine what they did, how they did it and what else might have been done.

Jack Mezirov (1991),

presented a theory of learning in his book, Transformative Learning, in which reflection on experience and especially critical reflection are central. Mezirov suggests that when an adult encounters a “*disorienting dilemma*” or a problem for which there’s no solution suggested by

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the learner's past experience and knowledge, reflection is often triggered and can be composed of 3 levels of reflection.

Firstly, individuals often reflect on the content of the experience – what happened – which may or may not lead to learning.

Secondly, if they find and try other solutions that don't work, individuals often reflect upon the process they employed, ie how did it happen?

But, thirdly, when the reflection process probes the very premises (ie our deep-seated beliefs and assumptions that guide our actions) upon which we have built our problem-solving processes, then we have critical reflection. Others' views can act as mirrors for our own views and help us to re-evaluate and to reorganize them in a way that gives new meaning.

Critical reflection confronts and challenges how we see and understand the world and can lead to dramatic shifts or transformation in the learner's way of viewing of the world.

Roles for Educators in Experiential Learning

Within the constructivist perspective of experiential learning four main roles have been identified for educators to assist and maybe enhance the reflective processes of the learners. These are the roles of facilitator, instigator, coach and assessor.

The Facilitator,

encourages learners to recall, value, talk about, and maybe critically analyse their own past experience to construct knowledge from it. A key responsibility of the facilitator, as experiential learning often involves strong emotions, is to create an environment of trust, authenticity, integrity and respect, as well as patience for all concerned.

It is of great importance that facilitators "walk the talk" and revisit and analyze their own experiences before asking learners to do so; that facilitators strive to update, develop, expand and deepen their professional perspectives both on their subject areas and on their goal and roles.

The Instigator,

is the educator that introduces experiential learning situations that are helpful for learners to analyse and reflect upon. Their aim is to engage the learner physically, emotionally and relationally.

The experiential learning situations can be: a) experiential classroom exercises, such as role plays and simulations, b) adventure activities, like a sequence of problem-solving activities, usually in the outdoors, where groups of learners work together to solve them. And c) through problem-based or project-based learning, such as case-studies, where learners read, diagnose and discuss the case, and explore strategies and plan action on the problems.

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The Coach,

usually works one on one within the actual context of a person's practice. The coach provides encouragement, draws attention to possible strategies, shares personal experiences that are relevant and helps the learner to come to terms with the fact that learning takes time.

The Assessor

of experiential learning is concerned with processes that are adopted by many post-secondary institutions and adult education programmes through which learners seek academic course credit for their life experiences. The educator is also concerned with how to assess personal development and growth, as well as development of knowledge and skills in informal and non-formal education situations.

In praxis, these four roles of the educator in experiential learning merge in a learning event because in the learning event *the concrete role of the educator is to:*

- 1) *Engage learners in concrete experience, as a starting point for building new knowledge.*
- 2) *Create conditions for educative dialogue during and after concrete experience.*
- 3) *Encourage learners' focused reflection, at different levels.*
- 4) *Provide support, as experiential learning can be confusing, emotionally challenging, unfamiliar and uncomfortable for learners.*

Critiques of the Constructivist theory of Experiential Learning, especially "Using" Experience for Learning.

In the context of Via Experientia: International Academy of Experiential Education, which is deeply rooted in the constructivist tradition, it is only right to mention critiques of this theory coming from other traditions. This is not done to devalue the theory we work by, but to encourage ourselves and other educators to be thoughtful when working in this tradition (or any other!) and to keep an open mind about our understandings of experiential learning and our role in it. Below are critiques or challenges concerning five areas of experiential learning:

1. *The primary focus on "reflection" as a mental activity and the limitations of this focus.*
The feminist perspective maintains that cognitive reflection is not as rational and controlled as it appears to be, as gender and power relations are not accounted for. The Psychoanalytic perspective points out that cognitive reflection doesn't:
a) provide deep understandings of the role of desire in experience, and b) it doesn't account for what happens unconsciously in learning nor does it c) attend to internal resistance to learning.
2. *The view of experience as something concrete to be reflected upon.*
Various perspectives, e.g. post modern and feminist, criticise the notion of a split between experience and reflection, claiming that experience exceeds rational attempts to bound, control and rationalize it according to pre-existing social categories and sanctioned uses. And they also point out that knowledge

creation is not only a cognitive process but also an embodied and intuitive experience. They state that there is a fluid relationship between the person, context/culture and experience.

3. The lack of consideration of the connection between people and context.

Here the critique by radical perspectives (e.g. transformative and situative views) concerns the separation of the individual doing the learning and the individual's context. They reject the assumption that the learner is autonomous from his or her surroundings; that the learner moves through context, is "in" it and affected by it, but that the meanings exist in the learner's head and move with him from one context to the next. These critical perspectives claim that "context" is a web of activities, subjectivities and language; that all learning takes place in context and all learning is influenced by context, and thus reject context as a static space separate from the individual.

4. The notion of learner as an individual self, who can reflect unproblematically.

The constructivists consider the individual a primary actor in the process of knowledge construction and understanding as largely a conscious, rational process. That is, the learner is assumed to be a stable, unitary self that is regulated through its own intellectual activity. Where, for example, post-structuralists, feminists and postmodern views hold that the self is multiple and shifts according to context.

5. The interventions of educators as 'managers' of others' experiential learning.

Many writers challenge mainstream experiential learning for wanting to "manage" the domain of experiential learning, especially when assessing life experiences for credits in the formal educational system. They claim that many practitioners are losing sight of the political focus of experiential learning that traditionally celebrates and acknowledges the importance of inner experience, human dignity, and the freedom to choose.

IV. So what?

To come a final time to the metaphor of the map and the territory, this text is a journey on the map and an attempt to get an overview of some parts of it. You start with a question and by arriving at some kind of answer a whole group of new questions pop up. It's a little bit like looking at the same territory on maps of different scales, like going from a scale of 1:250.000 to a scale of 1:100.000 or 1: 50.000, each scale presents a different view, but in the end only being in the territory exposes the real view. And this text doesn't even address the meaning or significance of "metaphor"!

And so what? In the end one has to live with all the unknowns, all the questions, and try to be open to them. Continue to be curious about it all, search for answers and the making of

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meaning on our journey through the territory. In the meantime we can do our utmost to develop our awareness of ourselves, others and the context.

And as we go along in building the Academy we can enrich our ideas about all this and make new insights and continue to improve this paper!

Final words

I am deeply indebted to the authors listed below for deepening my understandings of adult education in general and experiential learning in particular. It is also my sincere hope that the authors will be sympathetic to my liberal use of their texts without proper citations. It was not my aim to take their words and write them as if they were my own.

My only excuse is that this was done in an attempt to make the text more readable for the target group, i.e. the participants of the Grundtvig project: Via Experientia – International Academy of Experiential Education.

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