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Citation for published version:

Blenkinsop, S, Nolan, C, Hunt, J, Stonehouse, P & Telford, J 2016, 'The lecture as experiential education: The cucumber in 17th century Flemish art' *Journal of Experiential Education*.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Journal of Experiential Education

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Journal of Experiential Education

The Lecture as Experiential Education: The Cucumber in 17th Century Flemish Art

Journal:	Journal of Experiential Education
Manuscript ID	JEE-15-0006.R1
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	experience , experiential, educative , Dewey, lecture
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The Lecture as Experiential Education: The Cucumber in 17th Century
Flemish Art

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Or Peer Review

The Lecture as Experiential Education: The Cucumber in 17th Century Flemish Art

Abstract

This paper uses an unconventional format to problematize a common dichotomy found in the theory and practice of experiential education. The paper comprises the contributions of five authors and begins with one author's description of a potential real-life scenario that provokes the question of whether or not an art history lecture might be understood as experiential education. Three of the remaining co-authors respond individually and independently to this question and the final author joins with the first in the concluding comments section. The key consensus of the responding co-authors is that simplistically equating the Deweyan notion of primary experience with physical, tactile activity is a limited and limiting understanding of experience in education and that in fact, under the correct circumstances, a lecture can and even should be part of experiential education. Beyond this, the authors encourage educators to think carefully about the educational trajectory and contextual histories of the learners with whom they work. Finally, the two authors of the concluding comments suggest that the field, in order to do justice to the educational possibilities of all experiences, must begin to move beyond John Dewey while at the same time finding ways to overcome the deeply entrenched dualistic concept of experience that continues to affect our practices and theorizing.

Keywords

Experience, experiential, educative, Dewey, lecture

Introduction

This paper is unusual in at least two ways. First, it does not follow a traditional research form. Although it is clearly interested in questions related to experience and experiential education (e.g. What experiences are potentially educative? Where and how does experiential education appear? What is the ‘doing’ entailed in ‘learning by doing’? Does all learning happen experientially?), there is little in the way of method, findings, or conclusions. Second, it does not lay claim to any significant theoretical breakthroughs or pronouncements with regard to experiential education writ large. What it does do, through establishing a shared consensus amongst the authors, is a very important piece of philosophical housecleaning. It does this by clearing away the detritus of a lingering, possibly malingering, dichotomy that persists with regard to experiential education. This dichotomy persists, to a certain extent, within the field of experiential education itself but more clearly beyond the field in a world of educational institutions and policy-makers that is just beginning to rally behind the educational possibilities of a, as we shall later suggest, limiting concept of experiential education. This dichotomy is one which places ‘hands on’, ‘learning by doing’, ‘somatic, kinesthetic, and physically active’, ‘real-world and relevant’ experiences on one side of the educational ledger and everything else, implicitly and oftentimes condescendingly, on the other. Clearing away this dualistic theoretical dust is of crucial importance because it allows us as theorists and educators to focus our attentions more clearly on the educational question of any experience at hand rather than becoming focused simply on the nature of the experience itself.

In fact it was the very way this discussion was playing out at SFU, Blenkinsop’s home institution, that inspired the writing of the short vignette below. With a growing interest in all things experiential that university asked their professoriate to submit their experiential course

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3 components so that a comprehensive list could be compiled. Predictably, given the previous
4 paragraph, the final list was full of science labs, job placements, service learning, field trips, and
5 role plays with nary a mention of lectures, readings, or even discussion groups. Intriguingly, this
6 invoked some faculty to respond with quite nuanced discussions as to why what they were doing
7 was also experiential education even if it lacked the seeming real world relevance and physicality
8 of the proffered list. One key objection, and we shall return to this in our concluding comments,
9 came from Indigenous scholars and educators who expressed some disbelief in having their work
10 with story and other forms of orality not considered experiential.
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22 Historically we know that John Dewey wrote extensively about experience yet eventually
23 abandoned the term (Dewey, n.d./1981a, p. 361) because he felt it to be so overburdened with
24 meanings that it prevented his project for a theory of education from being adequately
25 understood. We also know that a lack of clarity continues to surround what is meant by
26 experience or experiential in the educational domain (Fox, 2008; Quay, 2013; Roberts, 2012). As
27 Dewey's abandonment of the term foretold, the notion of experience in the context of education
28 has been interpreted and applied in so many different ways that it risks meaninglessness. Seaman
29 and Nelsen (2011, p. 7) state that the tradition of experiential or experience-based learning
30 demonstrates a tendency to cherry-pick pedagogical methods or theoretical assertions at the
31 expense of the broader curricular and social aims that informed Dewey's (1916/1997;
32 1929/1958; 1934; 1938/1997) greater project. As a result, attempts to place experience at the
33 heart of education end up being characterized by a theoretically and pedagogically limited
34 teaching technique of facilitating 'learning by doing' (Roberts, 2012).
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53 Beard and Wilson (2006, p. 1) summarize experiential learning by contrasting it with
54 'traditional' learning which is characterized as consisting of a teacher feeding information to
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3 participants who then regurgitate it without any meaningful engagement. This paper
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6 problematizes the assumptions that underpin this seemingly straightforward juxtapositioning of
7
8 supposed experiential and traditional pedagogies and does this in an unconventional way.
9
10 Blenkinsop, inspired by the challenges of the university, chose to test a hypothesis with regard to
11
12 the aforementioned dichotomy by writing a short vignette, shared below, where a lecture is
13
14 positioned as the main experience such that it aligns with the major tenets of experiential
15
16 education.¹ The vignette was then sent out to three scholars in the field, they were forbidden to
17
18 communicate with one another, given a short 1000 word limit, and asked to respond. These
19
20 responses, in no particular order of importance, follow the vignette. The final section, which is
21
22 written by Telford, adding another set of eyes, and Blenkinsop acts not as a conclusion *per se* but
23
24 as a series of comments that attempt to bring together the three responses. Divided into three
25
26 sections the final section focuses on areas of overlap and even consensus amongst the responses,
27
28 notes a series of interesting ideas offered by the authors which might become venues for further
29
30 exploration, and points towards some of the possible gaps in these short responses. It also
31
32 proposes challenges that remain and potential next steps for those interested in these questions of
33
34 experience and education.
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43 The scenario

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46 Please note that the intention of the scenario described below is not to be facetious in any
47
48 way—the subject matter and associated questions are viable and meaningful in the world of art
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55 ¹ It should be noted that this vignette could just as easily have been done in the reverse. With an
56 iconic experientially educative activity such as rock climbing scenario set up in such a way as to potentially
57 appear to be miseducative and thus provoke the dichotomy in the opposite direction where an active,
58 engaging, relevant experience actually either fails to be or is extremely limited in its educational outcomes.
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3 history—but rather to find a question esoteric enough that the obvious ‘make it hands-on
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5 learning then we’ll know it’s experiential education’ option does not appear.
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10 Paula and the lecture by Sean Blenkinsop

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13 Our fictional story begins with Paula, a twenty something Brazilian art lover and
14
15 historian with a fiery passion and focused fascination for 17th century Flemish art. Her interest is
16
17 so specific that, after careful explorations with regards to the trompe-l’oeil and the wall-rack
18
19 styles, she has alighted on the interpretive role of vegetables during that important epoch of the
20
21 Flemish still life traditions. She has studied the genre with great care and admiration and seen
22
23 many of the actual works available to the public. Yet, she continues to be drawn to this question
24
25 of the interpretive heft of vegetables. The literature is full of the experts’ thoughts on flowers: the
26
27 columbine’s indication of melancholia, the poppy’s whispered meaning of death, the violet’s
28
29 comment on modesty and humility, and the rose’s inferences towards love, transience, and the
30
31 Virgin Mary herself. Paula has a comprehensive understanding of the importance of the skull, the
32
33 hourglass, and the pocket watch in the Vanitas paintings²; this ongoing exploration of
34
35 impermanence and the passing of sensory pleasures that so dominated these Flemish masters’
36
37 thinking. And yet, the nagging question remains: Why the presence of vegetables? Why do
38
39 winter squash appear in the kitchen paintings of Jan Fyt and Frans Snyders? Why in conjunction
40
41 with asparagus or artichoke? What interpretive work are they doing that fruit, flowers, and dead
42
43 animals can’t, or that the artists don’t want them to do? Ultimately, what is the meaning and role
44
45 of vegetables—particularly the cucumber—in 17th century Flemish art?
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57 ² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Claesz_002b.jpg
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3 Paula has tapped out all her local resources—the library, the internet, her local painting
4 classes, not to mention the patience of the art historian at the nearby university. Paula is at the
5 edge of her knowledge, possibly at the edge of all knowledge with regards to this question, with
6 no obvious way forward. How might she propel her learning forward, given everything she
7 knows and the questions she is asking? Then, Paula learns that the local Dutch appreciation
8 society house has invited Dr. Jan de Wey to give a talk on Flemish still life painting with a
9 particular focus on vegetables. Paula is thrilled; the world’s leading expert is coming to her. She
10 prepares carefully, clarifies exactly what it is she knows (thinks she knows) while also drawing
11 up a list of key questions she would like to have answered.
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24 Dr. de Wey’s talk is wonderful, it covers much of the background that Paula already
25 understands and confirms many things she has suspected and been theorizing about. It answers
26 several of her listed questions while opening up new venues for possible exploration and even
27 several sites of dissent she has with the esteemed doctor. Afterwards, Paula has the opportunity
28 to ask directly some of her other pressing questions and venture into some of the new areas she
29 has generated over the course of the lecture. Dr. de Wey engages deeply, thrilled to encounter
30 another lover of profound questions, and they continue until most of the other audience members
31 have found their way home. It is a thrilling evening and Paula finds herself in a deeply reflective
32 mood. So many of her previous questions have been answered, her understanding of the subject
33 has deepened and moved forward in really exciting ways. She can also see the next questions
34 beginning to form and new projects to get onto right away. She floats home on a wonderful cloud
35 of all she has learned and in the deep awareness of all there is still to learn. She knows the
36 questions will continue and that she has the wherewithal to answer them.
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4 And so, the question is this: Given that the lecture by Dr. de Wey was certainly a lived
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6 experience, that Paula moved through all the suggested steps of an experientially educative
7
8 process, that Paula learned something and likely learned the most she possibly could have given
9
10 her situation, was this lecture an example of experiential education?
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15 16 Three responses

17 18 19 20 The quality of experience by Carrie Nolan

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23 In a word, yes. A lecture can be embraced within an understanding of experiential
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25 education as in the scenario with Paula and the case of the cucumber in 17th century Flemish art.
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28 It is not the case that educators need to make experience a part of education, as it is
29
30 indisputable that education unavoidably contains all sorts of experience. As Dewey (1973/1981b)
31
32 states: “Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live-creature and environing
33
34 conditions is involved in the very process of living” (p. 555). To live is to experience. It follows,
35
36 therefore, that all education consists of experiences. The issue, however, is the quality of that
37
38 experience. Quality refers to both how palatable the experience is in the present (force) and the
39
40 effect of the experience in how well it leads to future endeavors (function). Dewey (1938/1997)
41
42 wished for experiences that would, “live fruitfully and creatively in future experiences” (p. 28).
43
44 Dewey considered an educative experience to be one that leads to growth and to being open to
45
46 further experiences, not for the sake of the thing experienced, but for the sake of learning
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48 because it, “arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are
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50 sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 31).
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3 We can see that the lecture was an experience of good quality. It enlivened Paula, and functioned
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6 to carry her forward in her quest to understand the cucumber.

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8 Experience, according to Dewey, is both passive and active, trying and undergoing. As he
9
10 says: “doing becomes a trying; an experiment with the world to find out what it is like; the
11
12 undergoing becomes instruction—discovery of the connections of things” (Dewey, 1973/1981b,
13
14 p. 496). Where there is no conscious connection between doing and undergoing the potential for
15
16 learning is significantly diminished due to the fact that “A separation of the active doing phase
17
18 from the passive undergoing phase destroys the vital meaning of an experience” (Dewey,
19
20 1973/1981b, p. 505). Experiential education involves doing and undergoing in conscious
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22 relationship where the body matters, the senses are given a place of consequence, and where it is
23
24 the relationships between things and between the learner and things that is the focus. For Paula,
25
26 she came to the lecture, which is undergoing in that it is instruction about the connections of
27
28 things, with prior doing that contributed to the experience of the lecture being educative.
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34 Interest is essential in propelling one through the process of inquiry, which can be
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36 understood to incorporate both the doing and the undergoing that are necessary in an experience
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38 of force and function. Dewey (1915, pp. 42-47) conceptualizes interest as an inherent human
39
40 instinct and offers four categories by which the expression of interest can be observed: making
41
42 things, finding things out, artistic expression, and conversation. Importantly, interest is not a
43
44 narrowly psychological response to an environmental stimulus, but rather an expressive
45
46 characteristic of being human. Dewey (1973/1981b, pp.430-432) identifies three phases of
47
48 interest: active, objective, and subjective. The active phase concerns the initial impulse of taking
49
50 interest. In the objective phase, impulse metamorphoses into a conscious connection with the
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52 object of interest. The subjective phase regards the attribution of value or worth to the object.
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3 Interest is inextricably connected to notions of identity and self (Dewey, 1916/1997, p. 351-352)
4
5 whereby interest is fundamentally an expression of self and self is subject to modification as a
6
7 result of actions taken. We might consider interest in such contemporary terms as being
8
9 ‘invested’ in or feeling a sense of ‘ownership’ of one’s learning as opposed to a transitory,
10
11 whimsical sense of pleasing amusement or entertainment.
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15 Interest functions as motivation “to arouse energy, to stimulate the means necessary to
16
17 accomplish the realization of ends” (Dewey, 1973/1981b, p. 437). Clearly, Paula was motivated
18
19 to take in the lecture based on her interest. In situations where the interest of attendees in the
20
21 topic of the lecture might be reasonably argued to be less reliable than a public lecture to a select
22
23 group of art aficionados — a university lecture, perhaps, where students may be attending for a
24
25 variety of reasons ranging from coercion to social presentation of self — the experience might
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27 have neither force nor function for those lacking interest. And this is where there is potential to
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29 not engage in an educative experience, and so it falls upon the teacher, working with the student,
30
31 to find and bring forth connections of interest for the students. And for students to take
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33 responsibility too. An educative experience, be it lecture or rappelling, requires that the content
34
35 is associated with relevant experiences that connect to the intended area of learning.
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41 When these elements of experience such as trying, undergoing, and interest are present,
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43 as they were for Paula in the lecture from Dr. de Wey, then we might reasonably consider that
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45 the learning has taken place within a framework understandable as experiential education. This
46
47 lecture differs from what might be described as formalized experiential learning experiences.
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49 These formalized experiences involve contexts where teaching and learning have been
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51 intentionally framed to encourage connections between doing and undergoing and which are
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53 explicitly promoted to identify with experiential education as a theoretical concept. With
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3 Paula's prior experience and inclinations, however, the lecture is sufficient as experiential
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5
6 education.

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8 It is important to acknowledge, conversely, that not every student engaging in a formally
9
10 designed experiential education endeavor such as rappelling will necessarily have educative
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12 experiences. As educators, we don't know how each individual will take up the process, but
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14 experiential education should be intentionally designed to encapsulate in a learning endeavor
15
16 what Dewey (1938) meant by educative experience.
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19 20 21 22 23 Esthetic experience by Jasper Hunt

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26 To clearly show how the lecture Paula attended is both an educational experience and
27
28 also an example of experiential education it is important to go back to the beginning of the
29
30 situation, rather than start at the end.
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32

33 The question must be asked: Why did Paula become interested in 17th century Flemish art
34
35 in the first place? What got her involved in this quest? This issue is essentially a philosophy of
36
37 esthetics question. At some point Paula found herself within a situation where she had a
38
39 perceptual involvement with a work of art by a Flemish artist from the 17th century. What
40
41 happened upon her initial empirical experience with that work of art? Did she walk away,
42
43 disgusted, bored, repulsed, or otherwise not inclined to intentionally stay engaged with that work
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45 of art? Or did she stay engaged, empirically connected? What is important is the fact that she
46
47 stayed engaged.
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52 One of the most basic questions in philosophy of esthetics is whether or not beauty is
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54 contained within the art object itself or is simply a matter of what the viewing subject brings to
55
56 the context. Is beauty objective and independent or is it dependent upon the subjective
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4 experience of the beholder — rhetorically, ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’? This is a
5
6 quintessential case of philosophical dualism and was a subject dealt with in detail by Dewey
7
8 (1934) in his classic work, *Art As Experience*. Dewey (1934) argues that both the art object and
9
10 the subjective experience of the beholder bring something to the context of the esthetic
11
12 experience. If the object blocks engagement and the potential for further experience between
13
14 itself and the beholder, then the esthetic experience is cut short. It ends. This might happen in a
15
16 situation where the object is too overwhelming or at such a distance from the learner as to be
17
18 inaccessible. The same ‘cutting short’ result can happen in the opposite direction where the
19
20 beholder comes to the esthetic experience and, for some reason, does not engage with the object.
21
22 Again the experience ends. One can imagine a student being forced into an art gallery, or outside
23
24 for that matter, against her will and responding by turning away thereby blocking the esthetic
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26 experiential possibilities of the encounter.
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32 Dewey argues that a genuine esthetic experience is one where both the art object and the
33
34 beholder contribute something that results in what Dewey refers to as an esthetic
35
36 “consummation” (Dewey, 1934, pp. 35-38). Prior to the consummation both the object and the
37
38 beholder are esthetic potentialities (Dewey, 1934, pp. 287-288). Once they come together in a
39
40 moment of indeterminacy and the beholder and the object connect in an esthetic consummation,
41
42 then beauty — a single qualitative whole (Dewey, 1934, p. 130) — has been created. Note that
43
44 this has not made the object ‘beautiful’ by definition but that the encounter itself was beautiful
45
46 because of the connections made and the possibilities afforded. The esthetic consummation is a
47
48 connection made between the creator of the art object and the beholder, which invites the
49
50 beholder into further engagement with the object. Dewey (1938/1997) calls this the “experiential
51
52 continuum” (p. 35). Blocking further experience interrupts the experiential continuum,
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3 esthetically these would be understood to be 'ugly' or, in the more common educational
4
5 language, miseducative. Dewey attempts to overcome the previously mentioned philosophical
6
7 dualism by arguing that both the artist and the beholder contribute to the esthetic moment. For
8
9 experiential educators the challenge here is to think about how we act as artists in the creation,
10
11 selection, and positioning of educational experiences, our object corollary, while also orienting
12
13 the students such that the experiential continuum is the result of these beautiful moments.
14
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17 If the esthetic consummation happens in the dynamic interplay between the artist
18
19 (through the art object) and the beholder, then I argue that the beholder has had what Dewey
20
21 (1934, p. 131) calls a primary experience, a **primary esthetic experience** to be more precise. I am
22
23 assuming that readers are familiar with the general theory of experiential education that requires
24
25 primary experience be complemented by secondary experience. Paula, at some point in her life,
26
27 had a primary experience with 17th Century Flemish art which engaged her through an esthetic
28
29 consummation and impelled her into further inquiry and investigation. The further inquiry is a
30
31 classic example of secondary experience being brought to bear upon primary experience. This
32
33 resulted in Paula having an epistemologically significant esthetic experience.
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39 But her esthetic experience was incomplete. She was thrust into further indeterminate
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41 situations with her art interest that left her hungry for more knowledge and insights. She needed
42
43 more secondary experience in order to further her knowledge. Thus, she attended the lecture by
44
45 Dr. Jan de Wey. When she listened to the lecture, she was having another primary experience
46
47 (empirically grounded), which was followed by another secondary experience with Dr. Jan de
48
49 Wey when the lecture was over. Attending the lecture did not block the experiential continuum.
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51 Indeed, the lecture helped to inform and give depth to the experiential continuum experienced by
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53 Paula. What is key here is that the lecture was preceded by epistemologically significant esthetic
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4 experience in the life of Paula. For another person in the audience without any significant
5
6 esthetic experience of 17th Century Flemish art, the lecture may have blocked further experience.
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8 For example, the hypothetical reluctant student who was in the audience by order of a school
9
10 master, may have been ‘bored to tears’, unable to engage, and left with no desire ever again to
11
12 engage 17th Century Flemish art. The lecture would have been miseducative (Dewey, 1938/1997,
13
14 p. 35) for that student. For Paula, the lecture was educative.

15
16
17 Therefore, my conclusion is that yes, indeed, Paula’s experience of the lecture on 17th
18
19 Century Flemish art was well within the parameters of experiential education, and may indeed be
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21 a ‘beautiful’ example of it because, as an educational experience, it did not block the esthetic
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23 consummation and it was clearly an extension of her experiential continuum.
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31 Technique or philosophical process? by Paul Stonehouse
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33
34 Paula’s experience elicited a memory from my own life, some seven years ago...
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36 “I think reading can be a primary experience!” My exclamation seemed to echo within the
37
38 graduate-level experiential education classroom. The incredulity on the faces of my classmates
39
40 implied that I had just crossed a sacred line. My claim came from a tension I had been feeling for
41
42 some time: why couldn’t traditional methods of educating (e.g. reading, writing, and attending
43
44 lectures) be conducive to Dewey’s conception of quality educational experiences? It is this
45
46 question that I aim to address here in this brief response.
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50
51 I suspect that much of the disdain for traditional methods amongst experiential educators
52
53 comes from a reduction of experiential education to (mere) experiential learning. Roberts (2012,
54
55 pp. 4-8) differentiated the two, suggesting that experiential learning refers to the experiential
56
57 method or technique of ‘learning by doing’, which emphasizes bodily movement, hands-on
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3 activities, and out-of-the-classroom experiences. By contrast, experiential education is rooted in
4
5 a far broader **process** that addresses philosophical questions about reality, knowledge, and ethics.
6
7 While affirming the usefulness of experiential learning techniques, Roberts (2012, pp. 5, 8) noted
8
9 that the tendency to equate experiential education with learning by doing has left our field open
10
11 to trivializing critique, caricature, and even mockery.
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15 If experiential education is not limited to learning by doing, then just how does the word
16
17 ‘experiential’ modify the broader process of education? Chapman, McPhee, and Proudman
18
19 (2008, pp. 5, 7) suggest that it is relevancy that makes education distinctly experiential. Thus,
20
21 experiential educators attempt to create a learning environment where the material under
22
23 consideration is directly relevant to the learner. Students must be convinced that the question
24
25 under investigation is important, meaningful, and real. Something of value, to the students, must
26
27 be at stake (Crosby, 2008, p. 161). Too often, however, traditional educators fail to generate such
28
29 relevancy, and their lectures and assigned readings register as little more than “inert ideas”
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31 (Whitehead, 1929/1967, p. 1). Of course, this critique could equally be lodged at many outdoor-
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33 based programs that similarly fail to connect their activities (e.g. wilderness travel) with larger
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35 social and ecological issues.
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41 Dewey (1938/1997) described such disconnected learning as miseducative because it
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43 ignored his “principle of continuity” (p. 35), a principle that may further explain the current
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45 disfavor for lecturing amongst experiential educators. The principle of continuity of experience
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47 claims that “every experience affects for better or worse the attitudes which help decide the
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49 quality of further experiences” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 37). If lecturers were to consider the past
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51 experiences of their learners, make efforts to connect the lesson to the learners’ present realities,
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53 and make obvious the relevancy of the topic to the learners’ future, a lecture could be
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3 experiential in nature. Comparably, for outdoor-based programs to be experiential their educators
4 must also be mindful of the “principle of continuity” when preparing their lessons. Falling short
5 of this principle risks lectures that students may find boring and useless, and outdoor
6 programming that participants equate with little more than a one-off fun experience.
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13 Although there are many reasons for the lackluster performances we often experience
14 within our lecture halls, a main contributor is the challenge of the information age. Never before
15 have educators had to sift through so much seemingly relevant material. Anxious that they not
16 underexpose their students to the full scope of an area of study, educators dutifully increase the
17 density and volume of their lectures (Palmer, 2007, 117-144). Unfortunately, this excess often
18 precludes an essential element of experiential education: reflection. These educators have
19 provided a primary experience in the form of a lecture and the reading that accompanied it, but
20 may fail to provide a secondary experience in the form of reflective activities such as questions,
21 discussion, and assignments that require application and synthesis (Dewey, 1929/1958, p. 4).
22 Unfortunately, such an omission breeds irrelevancy tantamount to miseducation.
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37 Given this state of affairs, one can hardly blame a student for dismissing traditional
38 methods of education or deeming them an intolerable waste of time. While forgivable, I find this
39 assessment tragic. Many of those held venerable within our field (e.g. Dewey, Hahn, Leopold,
40 and Unsoeld) possessed their intellectual powers, in part, because of their classical educations.
41 No less of an experiential figure than Whitehead (1929/1967) reminds us that “the pleasure and
42 the discipline of character to be derived from an education based mainly on classical literature
43 and classical philosophy has been demonstrated by centuries of experience” (p. 61).
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54 Many experiential educators fall and/or have fallen into the trap of dichotomizing
55 educational experiences as ‘experiential’ or ‘not experiential’ instead of focusing, as educators,
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3 on the challenges of incorporating pedagogical methods of whatever kind in a thoughtful way
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5 that sustains learning through the continuity of experience. Every Spring I confront these
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7 challenges as I struggle to teach experientially a course on Environmental Ethics. Through trial
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9 and error, however, I believe I have made some progress. On Monday evenings, I show a
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11 documentary that encapsulates the ethical topic/issue of the week. As the students depart the
12
13 classroom, I hand them a list of questions on which to reflect. The film serves as a shared
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15 experience for the class, contextualizes the theory and philosophy we are about to examine, and
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17 emotionally engages (see Goralnik, Millenbah, Nelson, and Thorp, 2012) us in the relevancy of
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19 the topic. On Tuesdays, I lecture and facilitate interaction on the environmental philosophy
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21 chapter that they have read for that week. At the close of Tuesday's class, I again provide a list
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23 of questions on which they can reflect. Then, on Thursday, our entire class is given to discussion.
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25 Students are to come prepared. Sometimes they wish to discuss my questions, in other instances
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27 they wish to examine their own. Discussions are sometimes facilitated within the classroom,
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29 often outdoors, and periodically en route to a related local field experience. Thursdays have
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31 become a time to clarify understanding, to articulate the relevancy of the topic to our world, and
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33 to explore the implications of our new understanding for how we might more thoughtfully live.
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41 Admittedly, my students' favorite classes rarely fall on a Tuesday, but I believe they have
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43 come to see, articulate, and embody the relevance of philosophy to their moral lives. In this way,
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45 I feel we've come a little closer to Dewey's (1973/1981b) vision for education: "a process of
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47 living and not a preparation for future living" (p. 445).
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In Lieu of a Conclusion, Some Closing Comments by John Telford and Sean Blenkinsop

As is likely clear by now, given the format of this paper and the range of responses from the three authors above, it is impossible to come to a single summative conclusion, aside from the clear indication that experiential educators must continue to think deeply into their theories and pedagogies. It has been too easy to dismiss the lecture, the book, the encounter with art, or, as mentioned above, stories used in Indigenous education as not being experiential and as a result there is a danger that the taken-for-granted practices of experiential education have lost sight of some of the important components of experiential education that wrestling with Paula's lecture have allowed these authors to illuminate. So, although there is no single conclusion, there do appear to be several important areas of overlap allowing us to offer points of general consensus which, when taken together, form an important offering to the field with regard to the concept of experience and what might be necessary to make any single experience educative. The authors also offer several interesting observations which we shall briefly explore and then end with a review of possible venues for further significant explorations.

Part 1: General Consensus

That a lecture can be understood as experiential education might seem intuitively wrong for many who consider themselves experiential educators. Those who work in experiential education often do so in part as a reaction against educational formats dominated by didactic, lecture-style teaching. And yet, all three authors are quite clear, each in their own way, that the dichotomy – experiential/non-experiential – is untenable. A lecture, if offered in the appropriate way and in the right context can indeed be an educative experience. It can even be the best educative experience available at any particular moment. Yet, to this assertion every author attaches caveats.

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4 The most apparent and consistent caveat has to do with the learner. All three stress that
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6 the student's context, educational history and continuum, and even identity are necessary
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8 considerations. Paula is independently motivated, does not fear lectures, and has the ability to
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10 support her own reflective processes. As we all know these are not guaranteed realities for all
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12 learners. The respondents, therefore, have placed a heavy burden on the educator while at the
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14 same time opening up a huge array of new experiences (e.g. beyond the lecture, the artistic
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16 encounter and reading have been added) that might be considered potentially employable in any
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18 given learning situation. The burden placed on the educator is multi-layered. There is a clear
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20 directive to consider learners as being in process. Learners have educational histories, successes,
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22 failures, and proclivities towards particular experiences and topics, and away from others. They
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24 also have futures, directions they are aiming towards, and imagined possibilities. Thus, it is
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26 important that educators find ways to come to know these things about each learner while also
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28 understanding any experiences offered (including paddling rapids, doing initiatives, and standing
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30 in a circle reflecting) can act as an addition, subtraction, or blockage to a stream of learning and
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32 living that is already in motion, and is not a detached moment without context and outside of
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34 time. The issue of time needs to be considered in both the immediate and the long-term. For
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36 example, Hunt points out that not only might forcing a student to go to the museum, or jump off
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38 a platform, be miseducative in the moment, but if it leads the student to forsake all art or outdoor
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40 activities far into the future, then the educator has done a deep dis-service to the learner and to
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42 future educators as well.
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4 One other clear consensus that appears across the three respondents is the ubiquitous
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6 presence of John Dewey.³ In this case it may be because of the tongue-in-cheek presence of Dr.
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8 Jan de Wey, or the fact that all three respondents are based in North America, or Dewey's still
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10 deep influence on much of educational theory especially when the word experience appears, or a
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12 combination of all of these and others. However, we would like to suggest that this focus,
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14 particularly because the respondents want educators to attend to individual learners, is
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16 problematic and potentially limiting for myriad reasons; but we will draw forward two. The
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18 first, is that Dewey is clearly a product of his time with regard to something like the question of
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20 student identity. For example, he is unlikely to provide any guidance at all when it comes to
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22 questions of gender (ascribed and chosen), racial, cultural, and ethnic background, socio-
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24 economic status, physical attributes, identity politics, privilege, and so on. Yet these are
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26 important questions in our lives as experiential educators today. The second reason why it would
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28 behoove us to move beyond Dewey when considering experiential education is because much of
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30 the larger educational field has already done so for good, if varied, reasons. Constructivism and
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32 progressive education are being re-thought and re-conceptualized by curriculum theorists (see for
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34 example Pinar, 2012; Slattery, 2013), de-colonial and post-colonial work in education has
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36 pushed back on some of the assimilationist and colonizing tendencies in public education (see
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38 Pratt-Clarke, 2010; de Oliveira Andreotti & de Souza, 2012), and environmental theories have
39
40 rightly pointed towards a lack of environmental discussion in Dewey's work (Bowers, 2001).
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42 Our point is not to abandon Dewey altogether, but to recognize that we are in a world where a
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44 simple dualistic understanding of experience is neither aligned with Dewey, nor an expedient the
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46 field can afford any longer. We are in a time where we need to find ways to become comfortable
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57 ³ It is intriguing to note that all the authors use Dewey himself to debunk what might be considered
58 the dualistic experiential education 'street myth' of Dewey.
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3 with a non-dualistic and deeply nuanced concept of experience and with a consideration of the
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5 multi-faceted, multi-dimensional learners with whom we work.
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8 It is in response to this goal of moving beyond dualism, a tension which admittedly
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10 continues at times to exist in this paper, that we think the respondents above have offered a very
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12 interesting educational metaphor – experiential educator as artist. Hunt refers to the idea that a
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14 “successful” art object is one that draws the beholder into “further engagement” not only with
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16 the object itself but also with the creator thereof and also with others who are actively
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18 encountering the object. This is clearly analogous to a discussion of the relational dynamic
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20 between learner, educator, materials used, and the educational experience. The artistic metaphor
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22 illustrates well the false dichotomy of experiential/non-experiential and provides a starting point
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24 for rich conversations related to the multi-directional relationships inherent in learning situations.
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30 Given the responses in this paper, it would appear that the false dichotomisation of
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32 learning experiences is a distraction from, and a hindrance to, developing a theoretically robust
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34 concept of experience that is able to deal with the multi-culturalism, poly-vocality, and diversity
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36 of our students. It also distracts from the real goal of facilitating the best educative experiences
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38 that are relevant to the learners involved, the environment engaged, and the socio-cultural
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40 context. However, it is clear that within the broad conversation of education the intent of
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42 qualifying education as experiential or non-experiential has been done for important and
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44 significant reasons. Theorists and educators in search of ways to clarify educations that are
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46 successful often include many of the characteristics presented here – relevance, interest, trying,
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48 undergoing, the interplay between primary and secondary experience, an esthetic consummation
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50 – all things which collectively we might simply describe as the search for ‘good’
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52 education/teaching/learning. And so by denying the dualism and expanding the possible range of
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3 experiences available we have shifted the focus away from the 'dust' described above and
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6 towards the rich earth of experiential practice.
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8 The scenario involving Paula provides provocative possibilities for how all educators,
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10 and not just those who hive themselves off as experiential educators, might understand
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12 experiential education while also providing rich fodder for further discussion. Consideration of
13
14 the three responses above exhorts us to continually examine our understanding of what a positive
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16 educational experience might be as we reflect on the broader cultural context, the individual
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18 histories and educational trajectories of each learner we encounter, and the future possibilities
19
20 and foreclosures that any experience might offer.
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