

# The “Net Worth” of Applied Learning: How Holocaust Survivors Counter Educational Consumerism

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*Shrinking financial support for higher education has renewed interest in market-based approaches that define education as a consumer transaction. This model fails to acknowledge many character-based dimensions of experiential learning. Testimonies from Holocaust survivors reveal three habits of character not captured by educational models that focus primarily on efficiency: embracing personal agency, readiness to act in the face of uncertainty, and creative adaptability that builds resilience to setbacks.*

In *Dialogic Civility in a Cynical Age*, Ronald Arnett and Pat Arneson (1999) portray the future of respectful but substantive human communication in terms that translate easily to the prognosis for applied learning pedagogies. Arnett and Arneson observe the need to combine hope and cynicism into a guiding metaphor of hope within limits, not blind optimism or jaded nihilism (1999, pp. 25-26). Discussions of applied learning could profit from this advice. Amid ongoing fiscal straits that threaten to straitjacket or strangle many academic and co-curricular programs, experiential learning can survive and prosper only by proving its relevance and clearly articulating its benefits without overreaching to impersonate a panacea for all educational woes. Cynicism and hope can harmonize to produce “a voice of both caution and possibility” (Arnett & Arneson, 1999, p. 28), a tone that resonates well in an economic environment that seems to call for pedagogical minimalism under the banner of accountability. To be accountable as a prudent steward of educational investment supposedly requires maximizing

efficiencies, increasing class sizes, spending less per student, and scaling back plans that might require labor-intensive extensions of learning beyond traditional classrooms. This essay takes a different approach to the position applied learning can and should occupy in a time of economic uncertainty and frugality. Instead of retreating to a “back-to-basics” mentality of retrenchment that treats unfamiliar or more labor-intensive disciplines and pedagogies as threats, the following analysis contends that applied learning, *properly applied*, can form an essential part of the core knowledge and skill sets required to thrive in turbulent times.

The first step in assessing what applied learning can offer to stem the tide of educational minimalism is to change the philosophical and discursive landscape. The initial section of this piece questions the value—cognitively, morally, and economically—of framing education primarily as a consumer-driven, capitalistic enterprise. The extension of a market-based frame to higher education, despite its aggressive resurgence when economic challenges are foregrounded, inadequately accounts for the social responsibilities incumbent on all members of the educational community.

Second, the potential educational dividends of applied learning receive attention. The route that leads through this intellectual territory might seem circuitous, as it intertwines applied learning pedagogies with Holocaust survival testimonies. This path, although unconventional, has ample justification. My research on identity formation after the Holocaust involves gathering and scrutinizing first-person testimonies from Holocaust survivors. This process of narrative collection and analysis reveals some important qualities of firsthand experience that escape the customary modes of discussing and assessing applied learning. Close attention to these testimonies can reveal far more than one person’s perspective on historical events. Each survivor has been faced with disruptive, traumatic personal experiences that played an important role in shaping his or her life. If anyone can teach lessons about how to learn experientially, it would be Holocaust survivors.

The survivors, however, were not passively undergoing experiences and reacting to them. Although often labeled Holocaust “victims,” survivors have faced an enduring challenge of crafting their selfhood

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after their lives had been jarred, damaged, and interrupted. The continuing task—indeed, for many survivors, imperative—of rebuilding their world that had been ruptured is summarized by the rabbinic concept of *tikkun olam*, usually translated as “repairing the world” (Lee, 1990). The process of rebuilding society, modernized as the struggle toward social justice by recognizing, responding to, and rectifying injustice, directly connects the experience of Holocaust survivors to the mission of any socially conscious employment of applied learning. If one goal of applied learning is to equip students to engage more deeply in social action and to participate more fully in democratic processes, then we might well listen to the words of Holocaust survivors.

### **REFRAMING CONSUMERISM AS RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP**

Higher education stands astride two competing forces and voices that articulate divergent values: the voice of efficiency and the voice of effectiveness. When funding shrinks, the voice of efficiency gains ascendancy. Calls for efficiency often occur within a broader framework that depicts higher education as a consumer-driven endeavor. Institutions tout their concern for students, who are labeled the “customers” of higher education. Brandishing the verbiage of global economic struggle to dominate the marketplace, colleges and universities arm students for cutthroat competition in the job market.

The calls to “get close to the customer” seem to embrace an empowering notion of students as the drivers of higher education. What could be objectionable about placing students at the center of educational endeavors? Furthermore, what concerns could arise from increasing efficiency? Why should efficiency pose any problems? The simple answer to these questions is that deepening the educational commitment to students clashes with the imperative of efficiency. Movements toward intensifying educational experiences, such as using “high-impact educational practices” (Kuh, 2008) that carry substantial experiential components, run against the current of efficiency. In fact, most educational practices acquire their status as high-impact precisely because they require dedicating more energy, time, and resources than required for other educational endeavors. Raising impact may lower efficiency. Phrased more euphoniously, embracing efficiency can sacrifice effectiveness. The reason lies in the very definition of efficiency. Assuming the definition of efficiency as the ratio of input to output, one quick way to raise efficiency is to deliver the same results while reducing investment in resources such as personnel, facilities, and equipment. While outcomes might resist improvement, input in the form of time, money, or other resources can be cut quickly. Doing the

same with less earns a higher grade for efficiency. In the realm of experiential learning, however, precisely what kinds of experiences deserve reduction for the sake of efficiency? Consider some examples from the pedagogies identified as high-impact practices. Student research by its nature concentrates faculty attention and institutional facilities on fewer students at a time, a far less efficient practice than convening a large lecture class. Writing-intensive and speaking-intensive coursework requires higher time investment per student (usually expressed as lower enrollment caps) due to reviewing several cycles of drafts and practicing presentations.

A deeper inconsistency lies at the heart of consumerism as a model for education. Customer satisfaction easily becomes reducible to an ethic of “please the customer.” Catering to the consumer can generate customer satisfaction, but how and to what extent does it expand student capability for thought and action? If pleasure serves as the measure for educational success, then students bear minimal responsibility. Their primary task lies in expressing what they want, and educational institutions respond by fulfilling those desires. A consumerist educational model includes no provisions for developing critical awareness, and students incur no obligations to anyone or anything not served by the pursuit of their personal desires (Schwartzman, 2001; Schwartzman & Phelps, 2002). By failing to account for how the sphere of students’ desires might expand, alter, or be challenged, educational consumerism provides at best an illusory version of consumer empowerment that never coaxes them to expand their intellectual, emotional, or spiritual frontiers. Genuine empowerment consists of far more than demanding to be served; it also embraces the capacity to serve others. While the marketplace measures success by what one can get, one important measure of a person’s value in a democratic society consists of what one is willing to give.

## COUNTERACTING CONSUMERISM

Even the Rolling Stones recognized that “You Can’t Always Get What You Want.” Despite that revelation, the consumerist approach attempts to maximize student satisfaction by (a) uncritically validating desires by striving to fulfill them, (b) incorporating no mechanism to distinguish momentary whims from genuine needs, (c) reducing educators to instruments for fulfilling desires. The fundamental drawback of this approach lies in its utter amorality, since the acquisition of whatever is wanted—equivalent to producing the goods—takes precedence over how desires are shaped or what value they have. In short, each individual’s ability to acquire the goods outweighs the collective pursuit of the good. Adopting terminology from *The Good Society*, there remains a pressing need to rethink education, to transform (or reclaim)

it from “infrastructure for competition” and treat it “more as an invaluable resource in the search for the common good” (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1992, p. 175).

Many types of applied learning deliberately place students in situations where outcomes are underdetermined. If students face the challenge of an environment less structured than their traditional class format, they may embrace the opportunity to exercise leadership by setting goals and developing procedures (Crutsinger, Pookulangara, & Tran, 2004). For example, how does a student conduct conversations with people who speak a different language? How does a student cope with a community partner who has no access to social networking tools or clients whose availability does not match the student’s schedule? Contrary to the consumer model, the educational value of these situations is proportionate to the degree they *do not* satisfy student desires for ease and convenience. Violating expectations can have a positive effect by encouraging students to develop flexibility and to become focused on desires other than their own. Instead of confirming existent expectations, novel forms of experience challenge expectations. Fitting within the known comfort zone satisfies consumers. Education begins by cracking the carapace that ensconces students in the familiar.

Applied learning, if carefully practiced, can refine the processes students employ to gain knowledge. As subsequent discussion will reveal, Holocaust survivors exemplify some modes of appropriating experiences that equip them with moral and intellectual habits. Here a “habit” designates a value-infused commitment to act in certain ways. Approached in the context of social responsibility, habits remind each social actor that personal choices carry implications for others. This value-laden component of action falls beyond the purview of educational consumerism. The terminology of “habits” intentionally departs from the more familiar approach to measuring “learning outcomes,” usually defined as quantifiable improvements in performing specific tasks. Much like Aristotle sought to build character (*ēthos*) through virtue—the disposition to act ethically—rather than through encouragement of individual ethical acts, the greatest value of applied learning may lie in the cultivation of habits crucially important in fostering peaceful, collaborative, and innovative human communities (Bellah et al., 1985).

## **BUILDING RESPONSIBLE GLOBAL CITIZENS**

The ability to navigate a multicultural environment, including increasingly diverse workplaces and educational institutions, qualifies as a vital skill whose importance will only increase throughout the 21st century. The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) encourages study abroad as a means for developing global

citizens, which requires the ability to cooperate—rather than simply compete—across cultural divides to cope with issues that transcend national boundaries (Lewin, 2009). These pressing matters include poverty, hunger, environmental degradation, terrorism, oppression, and threats of genocide. Yet, sheer geographic mobility, with its attendant exposure to different nations and cultures, may provide an insufficiently robust experience to cultivate global citizenship.

Exposure to unfamiliar experiences provides a necessary but not a sufficient condition for reaping the rewards attendant to intercultural competence (Leung & Chiu, 2008). Creative problem-solving skills would seem to increase as students gain exposure to different perspectives and ways of life. This expansion of one's perception of possibilities should encourage approaching challenges in novel ways as a student broadens the perspectives of potential responses beyond familiar, culturally bound repertoires. Recent and emerging research on international experiences reveals that mere exposure to new cultures, while helpful, does not in itself trigger the benefit of increased creativity. Presumably, any contact with another culture would lead to at least an incremental improvement in open-mindedness and a concomitant reduction in ethnocentrism. Apparently the experience of interfacing two or more cultures through actively comparing them yields greater cognitive dividends than passive observation (Maddux, Leung, Chiu, & Galinsky, 2009). This point may explain why traveling abroad does not seem to stimulate the same kinds of creative thinking observed in research on students who have lived abroad (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chi-yue, 2008; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009). The tourist is less likely to encounter situations that require adopting a native culture's perspective and departing from one's own cultural comfort zone. As a result, the more students are in positions that require them to adapt to unfamiliar cultural surroundings, the more facility they tend to exhibit on tasks that require creative thinking. Specifically, three conditions must be fulfilled for intercultural experiences to generate an expansion of creative capacity: "(a) whether the experience allows for juxtaposition and integration of cultural differences, (b) whether the individual is open to new ideas, and (c) whether the multicultural context encourages learning and minimizes the need for firm answers and existential anxiety" (Leung et al., 2008, p. 179).

These findings raise important and as yet unresolved challenges for various means of internationalizing college life or improving intercultural competencies. First, what threshold level of intercultural experiences can yield substantial, long-term educational benefits? The answer to this question requires confronting how to judge the depth and breadth of intercultural immersion. Tools such as those provided by Rodenberg (in this issue) can assist in institution-wide assessments.

Such matrices also hold significant promise for micro-level analyses of specific co-curricular programs and academic courses.

Second, how can the benefits of study abroad and other international experiences be replicated domestically, either in local communities or within campuses? At stake in this challenge is the potential to extend the reach of deep immersion in other cultures while reducing the financial and logistical demands these experiences place on students and educational institutions. Answering this question becomes more pressing in an economic and political environment that increasingly treats foreign travel as a luxury. Evaluated by standards of efficiency, crudely summarized in terms of resources expended per student or credit hour, travel abroad seems an expensive investment. What techniques, however, can engage students deeply enough in intercultural experiences to disrupt their frames of reference, stimulating them to explore other cultures in order to “find their feet” on unfamiliar cultural territory (Philipsen, 2010)? Schwartzman and Henry (2009), for example, proposed exploring the role that simulations and other technologies might play in instigating or deepening intercultural experiences. Other, “lower tech” methods could include altering the sites of coursework or other student activities to engage directly with domestic cultural diversity, such as different ethnic groups residing in surrounding communities. Campus-community collaborations might germinate “study away” programs that highlight the cultural diversity—racial, class, ethnic, or otherwise—in the immediate environs of the campus. Overall, intercultural experiences need to occur with sufficient intensity and duration to exert lasting influence on student attitudes and behaviors. Intercultural projects of longer duration enhance the formation of long-term, close relationships with community partners and peers (Pettigrew, 1998).

Sheer exposure to diverse populations does not suffice as a reliable stimulus for engaging with diverse ideas. Appreciation of another culture does not necessarily translate into directly confronting the systemic social structures and practices that affect a culture’s status and acceptance in a different cultural environment. Put simply, intercultural appreciation differs from deep immersion into the dynamics of how different cultures function relative to each other. That deeper level of engagement implicates power structures that merit critical examination if the relationships between cultures are to be understood. By fostering direct intercultural experiences, applied learning can foster critical intercultural consciousness, which probes beneath and beyond aesthetic intercultural appreciation. The difference between these orientations has profound consequences.

Aesthetic intercultural appreciation relies on a premise of accepting the inherent value of all cultures. This presumption provides a necessary (albeit not sufficient) foundation for navigating one’s way

across various cultures. Critical intercultural consciousness rests on more of a political than an aesthetic foundation. Critical intercultural consciousness focuses primarily on the conditions that foreground cultural identity issues, particularly concrete situations that amplify or diminish the power of one culture vis-à-vis another. Applied learning offers especially fertile—one might even contend, the only—ground for recognizing how these power discrepancies play out “on the ground”: by directly observing or participating in the lived practice of specific cultural groups. For example, the aesthetic intercultural appreciation that operates in principle throughout the United States—as expressed in idealistic endorsements of universal respect for people of all heritages—may fracture in the face of suspicions that arise with the arrival of refugees from unfamiliar places with practices that distinguish them from “mainstream” Americans. While aesthetic intercultural appreciation may gloss over cultural migration as a process of “blending in,” a more critical approach would investigate the ways that cultures negotiate their identities relative to one another (Kinefuchi, 2010).

Applied learning can foment critical intercultural consciousness by locating educational experiences squarely amid the often messy, continually renegotiated interfaces between cultures, thereby stimulating the cultural comparisons that maximize educational benefits. A basic principle to move toward this critical edge of applied learning would be to cultivate experiences that lie at sites of cultural disruptions and the adjustments they instigate. Too often, the immersion metaphor invites portraying cultural encounters as one culture enveloping another. The turbidity of intercultural waters may expose immersion as far too simple a master metaphor for this realm of applied learning. Immersion by itself does not equip students to plot a course through the rapids and eddies that characterize many intercultural encounters.

The critical aspects of intercultural applied learning carry special importance in the current economic and social climate. The growing popularity of right-wing, anti-immigrant political sentiment in the United States and Europe makes the need for conceiving groups in non-mutually exclusive terms particularly urgent. Research on study abroad notes that these programs stimulate creativity only if the participants maintain a high level of openness to altering their cognitive patterns (Leung & Chiu, 2008). Thinking in novel ways presumes openness to change, the willingness to risk the uncertainty involved in questioning and potentially departing from familiar cultural and intellectual territory. This openness to opportunities that might arise captures one aspect of how some survivors reclaimed life after the Holocaust.



## WHAT CAN HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS TEACH ABOUT APPLIED LEARNING?

The personal testimonies of Holocaust survivors furnish an unexpected source of insight regarding applied learning. My research involves gathering first-person narratives from people who directly experienced some aspect of the Holocaust, such as concentration camps, forced labor, hiding, fleeing, resisting, or rescuing. These interviews, augmented by archived audiovisual and written first-person testimonies, provide important cases for the study of applied learning. In addition to shedding light on individual experiences of trauma, the narratives demonstrate crucial characteristics of how to learn from experience. Witnesses to events of the Holocaust testify not only about what they underwent but also about what they made of their experiences. Besides triggering reflection on what happened in the past, the testimonies illuminate what resources these experiences can provide. More broadly, what lessons do the coping mechanisms of Holocaust survivors hold for understanding how to learn from even the most undesirable experiences? Far beyond serving as living lessons about the Holocaust, personal testimonies perform a more generalizable service: revealing the capacity of experience to build character.

### ACTIVATING AGENCY

The testimonies of Holocaust survivors suggest that experiential learning can instill a greater sense of agency among participants. Rather than lament the toughness of the times, applied learning can activate the capacity to craft what the times can offer. Shelly W. eluded the Nazis by hiding on a farm where she stayed amid pig sties and other refuges her pursuers might overlook. She emphasizes the reclamation of personal agency after her experience of being hunted as prey:

We can all have the power to affect the people around us and that was my way of dealing with it. Is that I can do something. I can do a little something. So that's what I do with my life. That's what I've done with my life. That's how I deal with it.

Shelly recounts no epiphanies from her humiliation, nor does she expect or demand a comprehensive resolution to the question of what she and others can do to prevent future genocides. She can offer, however, a resource available to everyone: a constant readiness to take action.

Shelly's assertion of agency embodies an approach to learning that differs from, and perhaps challenges, more familiar attitudes toward

education. That difference can be captured with images from the animal realm. Imagine the learner as a wild animal in unfamiliar surroundings. The learner who maximizes personal agency could be envisioned as always in a state of readiness, poised to act when the opportunity arises. More passive models of learning would employ phrasing such as “receptiveness” or “openness to new ideas” to describe an enthusiastic learner. Active learning describes more than a pedagogical approach; it highlights the conjunction between thinking and doing. Too often the receptive learner becomes the received knower who waits to get instructions—a faithful follower but an impotent initiator. Furthermore, mere openness provides insufficient resources for rendering decisions, especially deciding to intervene on moral grounds. Open minds can yield empty heads unless the moral grounds for constructive intervention are cultivated. Jack V., whose family hid Jews and other refugees in Holland during the Holocaust, states that they felt the moral imperative to help neighbors in need. Jack’s simple statement, “This is what I was always taught,” makes moral commitments and the obligation to perform them inseparable.

Barnett Pearce (2007) contrasts spectator knowledge with participatory knowledge. The spectator concept of knowledge positions the knower as an observer who reports but does not (and, epistemologically speaking, cannot) alter what is being observed. A proper observer maintains detachment from observed phenomena, which are classified as objects of study. Participatory knowledge, more akin to the type of learning that would accompany activities that foster social justice, places the knower as a co-creator of knowledge. Participatory knowers incur an obligation to interact with their subjects of study, and this direct involvement opens the knower to being influenced. The different terminology describing the spectator’s “objects” of study and the participant’s “subjects” of study encapsulates the relational nature of participatory knowledge. These epistemological positions also implicate divergent views of the relationship between the knower and the known. Unlike spectators, participants acknowledge and embrace the opportunity to interact with the conditions they study.

From a social perspective, applied learning qualifies as fundamentally participatory. The type of participation suggested here goes beyond merely taking action. It implies assuming the moral responsibility to contribute to the rectification of manifest social ills. Experiential learning mandates some degree of activism. Jola Schulsinger Hoffman, who endured the Warsaw ghetto and subsequent slave labor in Breslau, testifies to how her experiences have cultivated an activist imperative.

The meaning is that you make your life worthwhile. You do what you can. ... Maybe that's why I wanted to work in the city, because I wanted to see what it's like to be in there, to be an activist. Not just to sit back and say, "It's there, but there's nothing I can do about it." (Preil, 2001)

Many students and instructors seem to expect drastic attitudinal or behavioral changes from applied learning. They rationalize that the intensity of direct experience amplifies educational results. Customary modes of assessment may tend to reinforce this expectation. The greater the amplitude of change, the greater the presumed effect of the experience. As if experiencing a Pauline conversion, the ethnocentric student who studies abroad returns internationalized; the effete socialite becomes a community activist after undergoing service-learning; the apathetic laggard engages in undergraduate research and becomes an academic. While these hypotheticals qualify as wishful fantasies, they illustrate a point about assessments of quality that measure only *what* students believe or do. Just as the literary classics "are worth studying as examples of *how* to think, not of *what* to think" (Barzun, 1959, p. 275), applied learning might prove its mettle by equipping students with the knowledge of navigating processes for taking action. For example, research collaborations between students and faculty do generate knowledge about the topic being studied, but the transferable skills from this activity extend beyond field-specific knowledge. Students become familiar not only with methods of inquiry, but also with navigating processes such as the bureaucratic procedures of getting approval for research involving human subjects or the mechanisms of applying for grants. The willingness to act couples with the ability to implement actions.

## OPENNESS TO POSSIBILITIES

George K., a Hungarian Jew who served for a year in a forced labor camp, walked more than 360 miles—often barefoot—to find loved ones in Budapest after liberation. He observes that he and his wife (the primary focus of his journey) "have a good life now," and his wife interjects mid-sentence, "the foundation, the foundation from the beginning—hard work." Her comment refers to the willingness to work for the sake of the relationship, and it contrasts sharply with the involuntary labor performed by George as a sheer instrument to execute orders. George and his wife Susanna note his voluntary work ethic as a way to activate opportunities to make a future for the couple. Susanna notes: "He, wherever he went in life, he... went to work right away, the next day. The next day in America." In contrast to forced labor as an imposi-

tion of work, voluntary labor provided a means for George and Susanna to remake their identities and certify their status as genuine Americans. Susanna narrates:

We were here two weeks in America, just we went to an empty apartment and [George] said, "Susie, I am taking a second job. I don't want to wear any more European clothing. The first money is going to you. The second money, I dress up."

For George and others in the labor camps, compulsory labor had no purpose other than to mark them as instruments of someone else's will. If work has any potential for personal enrichment, it should offer creative opportunities to make meaning, to explore possibilities rather than passively follow instructions. Similarly, learning through experience activates the quest for knowledge that opens lines of inquiry, fueling curiosity instead of quelling it. Applied learning operates less as a pursuit of definitive answers than as an ongoing prospect for making meaning (Mortimer & Scott, 2003). Recast in literary terms, the uncertainties of learning in underdetermined conditions beyond the safety nets of explicitly codified course policies and student-centered guidelines preserve an open-ended plot line to enact the story of learning.

The desire to keep the story of learning alive, to avoid premature narrative closure, preserves hope. Morris Bergen, a veteran of the Tarnów ghetto in Poland as well as six concentration camps, points to the open-ended texture of experience as crucial to enduring even the worst conditions.

I guess, I had hope, only because I was curious to know what's going to happen. This...partially kept me alive, I am sure. Just, the curiosity. And I think a lot of people...if you ask them, you will find they feel the same way. Curiosity made you stay. (Preil, 2001)

Morris identifies the potential to explore where his story might go as a central factor in his survival instinct. The capacity not only to witness but to influence the course of events transformed Morris from a victimized object to an active participant in his own life story.

Morris' testimony furnishes a microcosmic version of the spirit pragmatists hope to cultivate in higher education. Richard Rorty (1999) articulates the vision "that the social function of American colleges is to help the students see that the national narrative around which their socialization has centered is an open-ended one" (p. 124). Rather than treat social conditions as ineluctable, immutable "givens," creative

meaning-making enlists students as authors of their own future. The perspectives of Holocaust survivors again offer insight. Walter Z., who lived through seven slave labor and death camps, instructively titled his unpublished memoir *In Search of God*. The title refers not simply to the challenge to theology posed by the horrors of the Holocaust, but more generally to Walter's lifelong dedication to inquiry and commitment to the ongoing creation of meaning.

Students who get involved in experiences beyond the classroom recognize that they partake of something larger than themselves. Class sessions and coursework are bounded by academic calendars and daily time slots, reaching closure by sealing the record with final grades. Many students recognize, however, that the clientele a community organization serves will still have unmet needs after a service-learning project concludes. The questions addressed by an undergraduate research project will persist, inviting new intellectual explorations. It is not unusual to find students extending and deepening the experiences that they embarked on beyond their formal forays into applied learning. For example, several service-learning project participants in my courses have gone on to work with AmeriCorps and other service organizations.

## RESILIENCE AND CREATIVE ADAPTABILITY

Ample scholarly and clinical attention has been devoted to the resilience of Holocaust survivors. Although the term's meaning fluctuates somewhat in the literature, resilience generally refers to the ability to withstand and creatively cope with disruptive change (Greene, 2010b). Rather than focus on pathologizing Holocaust survivors by casting them solely as victims of trauma, resilience calls attention to the resources survivors bring to bear in coming to terms with the challenges they have faced. One aspect of resilience involves adapting to uncertainty and recovering from setbacks.

Many educators express surprise at how readily students become stymied or discouraged when they must fend for themselves beyond the nurturing walls of academia. In service-learning projects, for instance, students who may perform admirably on traditional tests or papers may encounter difficulties with practical tasks such as leaving coherent telephone messages, confirming appointments, or responding promptly to community partners. The gap between student expectations and the reality of many applied learning environments highlights deficits in important life skills for navigating uncertainty.

A major impediment to successful student involvement in applied learning lies in student unfamiliarity with underdetermined educational environments (Schwartzman, 2009). Students who study abroad must

find their way amid unfamiliar cultural practices and outlooks. Living abroad or amid unfamiliar surroundings can call into question some of the taken-for-granted truisms of a student's native culture. Service-learning often requires placing the needs of community partners first, such as recognizing that scheduling generally does not obey academic calendars. Students who engage in original research projects quickly find that they must depart from the familiar territory of recapitulating the textbook. Such forays into unexplored intellectual ground form the hallmarks of applied learning, yet they fly in the face of the pedagogical practices encouraged and rewarded by consumerist approaches to education. Many students recoil from encounters with values that do not conform to those they already hold, believing that the function of education is to confirm pre-existing beliefs instead of question, expand, or otherwise scrutinize them. This form of withdrawal qualifies as a type of resilience, albeit an unhealthy one, as it simply minimizes risk instead of enriching the repertoire of responses to the unknown (Fosson, Rejas, Pelc, Linkowski, & Hirsch, 2006).

The turtle-like withdrawal into the shell of familiarity parallels the emotional numbing that some Holocaust survivors experience. Lisbeth Brodie-Judelowitsch, a laborer at Pawiak Prison in Warsaw, developed an emotional detachment that offered resiliency through insensitivity to the inmate agonies she witnessed.

You get so numbed that, up until now, I know that I am missing one quality. I cannot mourn. I cannot, I cannot feel the sadness that other people feel. ... There's a certain impossibility of feeling. I see and I don't see. I feel and I don't feel. As if a glass partition were between me and what was happening. (Preil, 2001)

While Lisbeth's numbing serves as a way to avoid reliving her pain, students may develop a pre-emptive emotional detachment that prevents them from deeply connecting with disadvantaged populations or unpleasant social conditions.

In many service-learning projects, for example, students may confront their own complicity in perpetuating social inequalities. Identifying oneself as part of a systematically discriminatory or oppressive social structure calls for uncomfortable confrontations with one's own values and practices. Faced with this prospect, students may implement "ego-defensive strategies" to resist the responsibility to rectify undesirable conditions (Erickson & O'Connor, 2000, p. 68). One such strategy in service-learning is to "blame the victim" by attributing the need for social services to the flawed character of service recipients, such as the need for welfare arising from supposed laziness (Hollis, 2004). This

attitude enacts a form of resiliency insofar as it protects the service provider from acknowledging any connection to the conditions that created the need for service. In this case, resilience degenerates into insensitivity to the social forces that perpetuate the need for service. The role of the service volunteer contracts to that of a provider of goods in the marketplace: meet the demand without examining why the demand exists. Like the manufacturer who relentlessly fuels consumer desire, uncritical service remains too detached from the needs of clientele to “analyze the structural inequities that create unjust and oppressive conditions,” thereby “providing what Freire called ‘false generosity’—acts of service that simply perpetuate the status quo and thus preserve the need for service” (Rosenberger, 2000, p. 33). An important social mission of service-learning, for example, lies in remediating social conditions to reduce the demand for services the students might provide. “The learning component should include not just career-oriented skills-building but critique of the social, economic, and ideological forces that generate the recurrent need for voluntary labor” (Schwartzman, 2002, p. 56).

Some Holocaust survivors describe a novel foundation for developing resilience to subsequent disruptions. This disposition, which qualifies as a habit in the sense described earlier in this essay, might bear the label “inventive audacity.” Paul G., a member of the French Foreign Legion who served in a forced labor camp during the war, relates how he obtained his first job at age 14. Paul boldly entered the fanciest hair styling salon he saw on the streets of Vienna. The boss said, “What do you want from me?” Paul responded, “I want nothing. I want to tell you one thing: you have a beautiful place here.” The boss said, “Well, thank you for the compliment.” Paul then asserted, “I would like to be an apprentice for you.” Paul continues in his own words:

So help me God that’s what I said to him. He said, “I don’t usually talk to children.” I said, “Well, I only can tell you I would love to work for you.”...“This guy,” he says, “is a little smart ass. I like him.” And off we went. That’s how I got my job.

For Paul, opportunity was not something given or found, but rather something created by having the audacity to take initiative and intervene.

The activism advocated by Holocaust survivors extends beyond simply taking initiative. They often dedicate themselves to community service as one way to resist or prevent the kinds of cruelty they witnessed and experienced (Greene, 2010a). Instead of serving as a means for fulfilling expectations or meeting requirements, action acquires a moral imperative. Lucie Pressburg Jacobson escaped from Austria on

the Kindertransport. Her mother successfully petitioned the Gestapo in Berlin to release Lucie's father from Dachau. Lucie explains that experiences are not simply events one undergoes and reflects upon. "And the whole thrust of my existence now is to let people know not only what took place but also how important it is not to be a bystander" (Preil, 2001). John Milton (2008), therefore, expressed an utterly misguided view when he concluded his sonnet "On His Blindness" with the line: "They also serve who only stand and wait" (p. 101).

## **CRAFTING THE CULTURE OF APPLIED LEARNING**

This study has used the first-person testimony of Holocaust survivors as an entry point to fulfill Janet Eyler's (2002) charge "to look more closely at how and under what conditions service-learning may contribute to expected outcomes" (p. 11). Returning to concrete pedagogical practices, how might the conduct of applied learning develop a productive form of resilience, manifested as persistence in the face of adversity and inventiveness when confronting obstacles?

One unintended consequence of highly structured guidelines and explicit evaluation rubrics is to focus more attention on obeying instructions and meeting requirements than on exploring possibilities that the instructor has not articulated and the student has not yet recognized. Students expect/demand, and "best practices" in teaching often recommend, exercises and activities that minimize ambiguity, offer explicit instructions, and lay out concrete evaluative criteria. Such clarifications of expectations form vital parts of the educational process, but they should not limit consideration of what lies beyond the horizon of established standards. Two examples illustrate the stakes in potentially underestimating what experiential learning can offer: diversity exercises and service-learning projects.

Laudable attempts to foster tolerance of different cultures and alternative social practices may fall short of engaging diverse populations on an equal footing. In the context of attitudes related to sexual orientation, the Riddle Homophobia Scale classifies tolerance as one of the "homophobic levels of attitude." Tolerance for homosexuals translates to grudging acceptance under the assumption that homosexuality is simply a passing phase or a chimera (Wall, 1995). On the Riddle Homophobia Scale, tolerance carries patronizing connotations. By aiming only for tolerance, participants in diversity-based activities may not move toward the deeper, sustained direct engagement with diverse populations that can challenge stereotypical attitudes (Schwartzman, 2010).

Some research on service-learning expresses concern that framing experiential projects as exercises in helping unfortunate populations



may make little process toward social justice. To the contrary, these experiences can reinforce rather than rectify social privilege. This backlash may stem from beneficent motives, such as a genuine desire to leverage the advantages of whiteness to direct attention or resources toward marginalized non-white populations (Endres & Gould, 2009). One problem with this approach (aside from its elitist patronization of the populations served) lies in its symptomatic rather than systemic orientation. For example, many students who participate in service-learning become personally concerned with particular individuals among the clientele they have served. A typical case is the student who befriends elderly residents of an assisted living facility. A symptomatic orientation confines students to focusing on the individuals who have benefitted from the student's intervention. A systemic critique would investigate the socioeconomic and ethical rationales that underlie placement of elderly in such facilities.

A decade ago, Robert Putnam (2000) noted that many educational activities framed as curricular enhancements—and he specifically identified service-learning—are often seen as add-on “frills” and are some of the first to suffer cuts in economic crunches. This vulnerability can become amplified when experiential learning gets segregated from the educational core as additive requirements rather than as constitutive of what counts as education.

From a pragmatist perspective, all education begins as applied learning in the sense that it constitutes the empirical foundation as well as application of knowledge. The descriptor “applied” is not an add-on or enhancement to some sacrosanct “basics.” Special course identifiers, such as designators for service-learning versions of courses, should not be misinterpreted to position application as a removable accoutrement to “regular” coursework. Rather than designate applied learning pedagogies as “enhancements” identifiable by additional responsibilities (such as study abroad, time requirements for service, site visits, etc.), why not point out the deficiencies of curricula that lack an applied component? Such a discursive and cultural shift places the burden of providing practical relevance onto those who refrain from applied learning pedagogies. Restoring applied learning to the essence of education requires more than administrative prestidigitation with curricular requirements. A fundamental expectation of a learned person should include the demonstrable ability to practice the principles that have been taught. This expectation introduces a kind of performative requirement, to move beyond the observation of phenomena and toward enacting ways to more deeply understand, alter, or react to what has been observed.

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