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Roberts (2012) identifies three main strands within experiential education: romantic, pragmatic, and critical. However, work within the general experiential education literature does not usually self-identify with a strand. Thus, while I agree with Roberts' analysis and partitioning of the field, orientations of experience and praxis are not always acknowledged, leaving many assumptions about theory and practice unnamed.

Critical enactments of experiential education exist (Warren, 2019); yet, no framework has been outlined in a coherent, succinct way. A lack of an explicit theoretical framework hampers critical experiential educators' ability to have productive dialogue within research (Itin, 1999) and to develop praxis that adheres to the principles of critical experiential education (Breunig, 2009). Thus, I seek to make explicit what is already implicitly known and practiced by critical experiential educators.

Further, much of experiential education is not critically oriented (Warren, 2019). For scholar-practitioners who are interested in reorienting their practice within experiential education, I hope explicit guiding principles within a critical experiential framework will provide some guidance on how to do so. Hence, the aim of this project is to provide guidance for not-yet-critical experiential educators to analyze their practices and to help critical educators have more precise discussions about their strand with explicit philosophical commitments and guiding principles of praxis.

To extract the essential characteristics of a critical experiential praxis, I explore the essence of experience within the field of experiential education, which directs a discussion of experiential education's philosophical roots. Following, I examine the three main strands within

experiential education praxis: romantic, pragmatic, and critical (Roberts, 2012). After surveying crucial elements of critical social pedagogies, I consider how experiential education's philosophical underpinnings take a critical shift to undergird a *critical* experiential education. On this foundation, I identify guiding principles of a theoretical framework. I also explore four examples of expressions of critical experiential education to illustrate the guiding principles in practice. Finally, I suggest a strategy to analyze practice in order to reorient it toward a critical experiential pedagogy.

Critical experiential pedagogy offers a new perspective for not-yet-critical educators, which helps keep praxis relevant and current. While offering guidelines for praxis, however, critical experiential pedagogy is not prescriptive and does not offer a universal approach; thus, critical educators also accept more variability in learning outcomes. In addition to strengthening experiential education's theoretical roots and critically reorienting the theory and praxis of experiential education, I believe that a well-delineated theory of critical experiential pedagogy will prove useful toward broader implementation of critical experiential praxis.

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CRITICAL EXPERIENTIAL PEDAGOGY:

ENACTING A CRITICAL EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

by

Colleen A. Thomas

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Approved by

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Dr. Glenn Hudak
Committee Chair

DEDICATION

My work in this program is dedicated to my two children. I love you, more, most, times pi, and times infinity. You make my world better, and you make me want to be better.

This paper is dedicated to Laura Perry, who never stopped believing in me from my first comment suggesting I apply to PhD programs. Thank you for your unwavering support. You make the world a better place.

My degree is dedicated to my mother and father. I love you. I hope I make you proud.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Colleen A. Thomas has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CRITICAL EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Experiential education (EE) is a philosophy of education adopted by many, varied experiential educators. While EE maintains a focus on developing learners to contribute to their communities (aee.org, n.d.), the contributions are not necessarily oriented towards social justice, by which I mean full and equitable participation in a society that meets everyone's needs (Bell, 2016). I believe in the value of creating more socially just communities, thus, I argue that pedagogy in EE should be (re)oriented towards more social justice-focused outcomes.

Numerous scholars have argued the usefulness of a critical (re)orientation of experiential pedagogy within EE (see, for example, Warren, Mitten, D'Amore, & Lotz, 2019; Breunig, 2019; Warren & Breunig, 2019; Roberts, 2012; Gruenwald, 2003). There are three main strands within EE; one of them is already critically oriented (Roberts, 2012). Yet, while there are experiential educators implementing a critical experiential education (CEE) in service of social justice, no explicit theory of CEE exists in the literature[1], perhaps due to its relative newness as a strand (Roberts, 2012) within the field of EE. The philosophical foundations and theoretical framework of EE are well documented (Warren, Mitten, & Loeffler, 2008), while an explicit set of expressly critically oriented philosophy and theory is missing. Thus, both theoretical and empirical scholarship is based on an assumed—not explicit—theory of CEE. My primary intention in this

[1] In my search for a theoretical framework for critical experiential education, I read dissertations, book chapters, and many articles, all of which claimed a critical or socially just orientation. Scholarship included key phrases such as EE and social justice (Burton, 2010), critical EE (Small & Varker, 2021), critical experiential pedagogy (Kapitulik, Kelly, & Clawson, 2007), and critical experiential learning (Johnston-Goodstar, Piescher, & LaLiberte, 2016) in the titles, yet none either outline a theoretical framework or reference one in their work.

project is to contribute to the growing body of critically oriented discourse within EE by expounding on the critical potential of experiential pedagogy (EP), elucidating a theory of CEE on which to base a critical experiential pedagogy (CEP), and exploring the praxis of such a pedagogy. I am ultimately concerned with how the praxis of an experiential pedagogy has been critically reoriented so critical elements can be introduced to all educational endeavors within EE.

For my research, I propose first making the philosophical commitments of EE explicit to allow for a critical examination of the fundamental assumption of EE. I then reconstruct the foundations with a critical perspective—that is, one that considers how power relations shape our experiences and actions in the world—to reimagine a useful praxis, within a critical theoretical framework, which both adheres to the commitments of EE and produces outcomes that are socially just in their orientation. In addition to strengthening EE's theoretical roots and critically reorienting the theory and praxis of EE, my hope is that a well-delineated theory of CEP will prove useful towards broader adoption and implementation of a critical reorientation of EE theory and praxis.

Background, Context, and Theoretical Framework

Background and Context

There is a wealth of information about the theory and practice of EE. The Association of Experiential Education (AEE), the most prominent professional organization for EE scholars and practitioners, defines EE as a philosophy "that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities" (aee.org/what-is-experiential-education, 2021). An expanding field of theory and practice, the foundation of contemporary EE was purportedly laid by educational philosopher

John Dewey (Breunig, 2008b). Dewey (1938) argued students must be invested and feel a sense of purpose in their learning, and that curriculum should be relevant to students' lives. Students learn best by doing, by engaging in an experience. Experience, however, also encompasses reflection to make meaning, which is imperative to the learning process. Dewey (1938) recapitulates the importance of EE as such: "What [the student] has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow" (p. 44). That is, each experience *in which we learn* equips us to better understand and deal with future experiences, leading to a cycle of learning and growth.

From the outside, EE may seem monolithic in its central organizing concept of experience. All experiential educators share similar *philosophic* commitments, for example, the belief that knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and dispositions are (co)created through experience and reflection. However, there are several notable strands, each with differing *theoretical* frameworks. Roberts (2012) argues that the conceptualization of experience, including its framing, construction, and underlying value, defines and determines how we conceive of problems within EE, the kinds of questions we ask, and the kinds of answers we seek; differing concepts of experience thus anchor and orient the various strands. Roberts (2012) describes four distinct orientations within EE: the romantic focused on the individual; the pragmatic focused on the social; the critical focused on the political; and the normative focused on the market[2]. These four strands represent the main theoretical influences on curriculum

[2] While Roberts (2012) describes four orientations of EE, I focus on the main three of romantic, pragmatic, and critical. I discuss the strands in more depth in Chapter 2. See subsection titled *The Strands of Experiential Education.*

projects within EE, yet the critical strand is the least developed and employed (Roberts, 2012). By critical[3] I mean an explicit awareness of the dynamics of power and social justice, with a focus on using experience and education as a means for emancipation and creating more just societies. While there is a large body of literature for critical education and critical pedagogy, there is yet a small, but growing, discourse in critical EE. Thus, although there is already a noted critical strand, I propose there is still meaningful work to be done to further the development of the critical strand.

"Experiential education" and "experiential learning" are often conflated and used interchangeably in literature and in practice. Although EE, often described as an educational *philosophy*, encompasses any *methodology* that incorporates direct experience into the learning process, for example an internship or adventure challenge course, experiential learning (EL) is one of the primary *processes* through which a pedagogy of EE is enacted. EL is a method of or technique for learning, while EE is a broader educational process of individualization and socialization (Roberts, 2012). Put another way, EL is a pedagogical *tool*, and EE is a philosophy that directs all pedagogical decisions. Experiential pedagogy, then, refers to the science, art, and practice (Watkins & Mortimore, 1999) of teaching and learning within the EE domain. The

[3] I discuss the term *critical* in more depth in Chapter 3. For clarity here, I am using *critical* differently from *critical thinking*, the essence of which is suspended judgment (Dewey, 1997). Critical thinking involves analysis of knowledge construction and the encasing social relationships and practices (Bermudez, 2015), and action and reflection can be understood as neutral acts. My use of *critical* implies the use of a *critical lens*, which attempts to deconstruct the "power relationships that frame knowledge" and reveals the "deep structural forces that regulate societies" (Bermudez, 2015, p. 105). "Being critical" both acknowledges relations of unequal power that harm and empowers agents of change for building more just societies. Becoming critically oriented, or critically conscious, entails critical reflection (which applies a critical lens to the process of knowledge creation, contextualizing analysis within socio-historically situated power relations) and critical action (which is action directed towards just social transformation)—the Freirean (1970) idea of praxis (Brooks, Braun, & Prince, 2022).

distinction between EE and EL is important because while EL principles and practices inform many educational approaches, it is not necessarily transactive in nature (Thomas, 2014). I explore this distinction and its importance in depth in Chapter 2.

EE presents itself as something of an alternative to a traditional educational model that privileges compliance, subject matter transmission, and teacher dominance through rigid enforcement of codes of conduct; EE can also be used in traditional classrooms to promote deeper learning (Roberts, 2016). A central theme in EE is that knowledge is (co)created through experience and reflection (e.g., Roberts, 2012). Due largely to its transactive nature, that is, a necessary relationship between a student and the teacher, the environment, and potentially other students, EE is always considered a political process; it accepts that it cannot be neutral and recognizes its role in building or inhibiting "the questioning habits of students, thus developing or disabling their critical relation to knowledge, schooling, and society" (Shor, as cited in Itin, 1999, p. 94). Thus, an implication of EE is an interruption or suspension of direct transmission of customs of knowledge, but always situated within a socio-political-economic context (Itin, 1999). At a basic level, knowledge transmission often focuses on procedural knowledge without understanding their purpose. More concerning is that this transmission socializes and indoctrinates individuals into society as-it-is (Biesta, 2010; Biesta, 2023), the status quo, presenting it as *the* way, not *one of many* possibilities. Yet, suspending the transfer of bodies of knowledge, which allows students to construct their own understanding (Kincheloe, 2004), does not necessarily translate into a disruption of the status quo. Indoctrination is insidious and will prevail without intentional and persistent activism (Kincheloe, 2004). Thus, while EE has excellent potential to create space for reflection (Itin, 1999), the opportunity is not always harnessed to be disruptive to the status quo, to be justice oriented.

EE explicitly recognizes the potential created from the interruption (Itin, 1999) without necessarily acknowledging underlying systems of power at work. From a critical perspective, which is always concerned with how power operates within education and through an experience, the interruption is a wasted opportunity without exploring issues of power and dominance. Praxis in EE varies, particularly between the strands noted above, and while the critical strand commits to confronting inequities, the others do not necessarily address the interruption with criticality.

Critical experiential education (CEE) commits to making explicit the dynamics of power and social justice within an experience and throughout the process of meaning-making (Breunig, 2019; Breunig, 2008a); critical experiential educators commit to a critical praxis (see footnote 2), using EE as a means to actuate a more socially just world (Breunig, 2011b). Becoming more critical as an experiential educator entails guiding learners to use their experiences and education to disrupt their socialization—indoctrination into a social order that privileges some and harm others. For educators committed to creating a more just society, teaching students to become more critically oriented—both recognizing how power operates to create injustice and taking action against oppression—must be an integral part of their pedagogy (Breunig, 2011a). While critical pedagogues' practice can take many forms[4], a critical experiential pedagogy (CEP) can be employed by experiential educators, discussed in Chapter 3.

EE has a long history, but most of the literature falls into either the romantic or the pragmatic strands[5] (Roberts, 2012). Further, the general theoretical framework and philosophical

[4] Examples of practice of CP in the classroom include intentionally building community in the classroom, co-developing assessment criteria with students, co-designing the syllabus, autoethnographic writing, in addition to experiential activities (Breunig, 2009).

[5] I discuss the strands of EE in depth in Chapter 2.

underpinnings of EE, discussed in Chapter 2, are aligned to support outcomes within the romantic and pragmatic strands. As noted, the strand that represents critical work is the least developed (Roberts, 2012) and needs a more well-defined theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

Although enactments on EE can vary widely, the domain of EE has a broad theoretical framework undergirded by philosophical commitments, which I utilize for this project. However, the three main strands of EE—romantic, pragmatic, and critical—adapt the common theoretical framework for practice, based on each one's conception of experience[6].

The romantic strand focuses heavily on the individual, and in an anti-Enlightenment move, leans towards the "natural state" and away from the corruptive influence of culture. Romantics eschewed too much structure so as not to threaten experience's transformative potential (Roberts, 2012). Enactments within this strand include wilderness and adventure education, challenge courses, and study abroad—to a lesser degree.

The pragmatic strand frames experience as social and transactional, that knowledge creation inherently involves interaction between experience and the world in which we live. Grounded in pragmatic thought, meaning-making in this strand is based on practical consequences (Roberts, 2012). Examples of EE within this strand include project-based learning, service learning, and some retreat-style trainings.

The critical strand considers the ways in which power influences experience, interaction, and meaning-making (Roberts, 2012). It rejects the neutrality of experience and attempts to cut

[6] Expressions of EE, like any other form of education, are complex and often share elements of different strands. However, notably, the romantic and pragmatic strands, while often employing critical thinking, are generally lacking a critical orientation. EE enactments—whether romantic or pragmatic—that have critical elements are categorized in the critical strand.

through the distortion created by indoctrination to cultivate a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Kadlec, 2007, p. 14)[7]—reading the world with skepticism to reveal hidden meanings or intentions. Manifestations of critical EE include, for example, critical service learning (Mitchell, 2008) and utilizing a decolonizing framework to revise experiential activities when working marginalized populations (Gadhoke et al., 2019).

The critical strand in EE has reframed EE's traditional approach to research and pedagogy by applying principles from critical social theories. The critical lens these researchers have used exposes unequal and harmful relations of power and animates agency toward just social change. Thus, I will also draw from critical social theories, such as critical pedagogy, to clarify how EE can become more critical in order to enact a CEP.

Statement of the Problem

There are a small, but growing, number of EE researchers and practitioners who are calling on their colleagues to be more critically oriented (Breunig, 2019; Roberts, 2012; Warren, 2019). Scholars in the critical strand infuse criticality into their theoretical framework, assuming others understand their foundation. Based on a review of the EE literature that is critically oriented, there lacks an explicit theory that scholars need to formalize the discourse around critical EE (see footnote 1). Critical practitioners utilize a critical lens to enact an experiential pedagogy (EP), making their intentions clear; yet an explicit critical experiential education (CEE) framework is especially important for practitioners since theory is a catalyst for praxis. Moreover, there is ambiguity in the literature around key concepts and terms (Breunig, 2019),

[7] Kadlec's (2007) work, demonstrating how Dewey's pragmatism can be congruent with critical principles, has been particularly central to my understanding of how the pragmatic strand of EE can be, and has been, critically reoriented.

such as experiential *education* versus experiential *learning*. This absence of a common theory and vocabulary hinders our ability to cooperatively theorize and contribute to praxis.

The lack of detailed foundational commitments and a theoretical framework for a CEE and a CEP leads to many assumptions within the critical strand about theory and practice, for example the types of reflection that lead to critical action (Breunig, 2008a; Breunig, 2009). This absence may also inhibit scholars and practitioners within other strands from attempting to become more critical. Thus, I anticipate experiential educators who are currently practicing within the critical strand or are interested in becoming more critical will benefit most from this project.

Purpose of the Study

My project aims to strengthen the theoretical roots of CEE. To consider the essential characteristics of a CEP, I look to EE theory and critical social theories to provide a theoretical framework within which I conduct my research. Principles and concepts—such as reflection, dialogue, and community—from EE and critical pedagogy, in particular, are threaded throughout the project, and will be dialectically woven together to develop a new theoretical framework, which will emerge through an engagement of theories. As does EE and critical pedagogy, I draw primarily from pragmatic, interpretivist, and critical traditions, and rely heavily on Dewey, Itin, Breunig, and Freire.

Breunig (2010) submits that EE research should embrace "the multiplicity and diversity of fields that the praxis of [EE] supports and encourages" (p. 259), including qualitative, quantitative, and theoretical/conceptual studies, yet suggests a paucity of the latter (Breunig, 2008a). The philosophical foundation of EE underpins the multiple theoretical frameworks of the strands, each informed by their conception of experience and objectives. Roberts (2012)

identifies two substantial gaps in the field of EE: widening and deepening its theoretical roots and reexamining and solidifying its purpose and intended outcomes. This suggests the opportunity to extend exploration within and between the various strands to widen and strengthen EE's theoretical roots; I propose further inquiry into the pragmatic and critical strands may be quite fruitful. In general, the pragmatic strand constructs experience within a framework of social harmony and the critical strand as a site of struggle embedded in issues of identity, power, and culture[8]. Each has something to gain from the other. The pragmatic will benefit from understanding conflict inherent in experience. The critical, which leverages experience to interrogate the everyday—the cultural hegemony within which experience is based, is susceptible to skepticism and cynicism that precludes concrete social action and may benefit from an infusion of hope the pragmatic can offer. Informed by Breunig (2019, 2010) and Roberts's (2012) statements about future directions for EE, my principal aim for this project is two-fold: (1) to strengthen the theoretical roots of CEE by expanding on research within the field that already assumes a critical lens (Breunig, 2008a; Warren, 2019); and (2) to propose a critical reorientation of EE theory and praxis that can be used broadly in the romantic and pragmatic strands. I anticipate this may result in a small but significant philosophical reorientation as I reexamine and suggest realignment of EE's foundational commitments.

Research Questions

I have three primary questions guiding my research, which seeks to understand how the praxis of EE has been, and can be, more critically oriented, particularly given the lack of an

[8] Kadlec's (2007) crucial work in Deweyan pragmatism convincingly demonstrates pragmatism is not incongruent with the ideals of critical social theories. This project builds on her work to illustrate how programs in EE, based on pragmatism (even if not within the pragmatic strand) might be critically re-oriented.

explicit theoretical framework in the CEE literature. The following research questions guide this theoretical inquiry:

1. In pursuing social justice, what are the philosophical commitments underpinning critical experiential education?
2. What are the essential characteristics of the theoretical framework used, but not made explicit, in the critical strand of EE; that is, what defines a critical experiential education?
3. What are current and potential examples of a critical experiential pedagogy in practice, and how does the use of a critical paradigm challenge and change the ways in which we implement experiential education?

Education, as a field of study, draws philosophically and theoretically on a range of disciplines in the social sciences and privileges the "theory of practice." That is, "education" itself, as a discipline and activity, is chiefly a set of professional practices, informed by theory and undergirded by philosophy. I'm choosing to focus on these three parts because, as with all educational praxis, philosophical assumptions, a theoretical framework, and examples of enactments of a pedagogy are all both inherent and indelibly intertwined. With the first question, I seek to elucidate the philosophical commitments of a *critical* EE necessary for a CEP, which I propose is a requisite realignment of the existing foundation to fully support a critically-oriented pedagogy. Next, I explore a theoretical framework on which to base a CEP, exploring how notions of neutrality impact EE. Finally, I provide examples from the literature of the practical application of a CEP and ideas of what might be, including praxis of critical service learning and critical outdoor EE. Through the systematic development of a theory of CEP, one that is both critically philosophically oriented and demonstratively applicable, I hope to augment EE's theoretical roots and enhance its potential to realize a commitment to social justice.

Rationale and Significance

Socially, politically, economically, and otherwise, I premise that a just world should be our consummate goal and actions should always be directed towards that end. Education, as an important public institution, should play a major role in shaping citizens capable of continually remaking society towards one that is more just. Experiential educators believe EE supports deep learning and prepares learners to be more engaged with their communities. Critical experiential educators also see CEE's potential to prepare justice-oriented learners. Thus, because I believe we should strive towards social justice and educators should find pedagogies that support justice-oriented outcomes, I see immense value in delineating a CEP for a clearer and broader use within EE.

A theme that emerged in the EE research literature is a similar methodological approach, grounded in an interpretivist paradigm. Inquiry seeks to contextualize EE within the larger field of education, understand participants' holistic educational experiences, and interpret educational outcomes and gains. As with research within the critical strand, I adopt a critical bent in my research agenda. I hope to productively combine aspects of the interpretive and critical research paradigms, moving beyond describing "what is" toward exploring "what could be" (Thomas, as cited in Glesne, 2016) for the future of EE.

However, experiential educators particularly within the romantic and pragmatic strands have not generally assimilated critical methods into their praxis; although an emerging theoretical framework, a critical orientation in EE is not common (Roberts, 2012). As such, there is still a relatively small collection of literature on promoting and enacting social justice through EE. In a review of the EE literature, only a small subset of work focuses on critical aspects of EE theory and praxis and/or social justice-oriented outcomes. Little has been written on specific

strategies broadly used in EE that can be used to promote or enact social justice. This indicates a need to elucidate a critical theory of EE and to further investigate ways in which experiential educators can promote social justice-oriented outcomes through their work.

Critical theory is a well-established philosophical tradition with a plethora of branches of critical social theories (e.g., feminist pedagogy, queer theory, critical race theory), any of which could provide a critical perspective through which to examine EE. A theory of education, critical pedagogy is strong in its philosophical development; the intended values and outcomes are clearly detailed (Kincheloe, 2004), importantly that education be grounded in the historical, cultural, socio-economic, political context of the larger community and promotes practices that have transformative social potential (Breunig, 2008a). In addition to a connection at the foundational level between EE and CP through scholar-activist Paulo Freire (Breunig, 2008a), critical pedagogy is the theory most often identified in the EE literature when exploring issues of social justice[9]. In my attempt to strengthen current scholarship in critically-oriented EE and expand its influence within other experiential orientations, I will draw heavily from CP, among other critical social theory, in my critical exploration of EE and development of a CEP.

We must consider how theory and practice can be employed to work towards the educational aim of developing a more socially just world. CP promotes practices with the potential to transform educational and societal structures and systems. EE and CP share common

[9] In the letter from the editor from a 2019 issue of the *Journal of Experiential Education* [JEE], Warren states, "Conversations about social justice and [EE] contain many questions. What is the place of [EE] in social change movements? Can and should [EE] be an educational agent of social justice? In addressing these questions, consider critical pedagogy" (p. 3). She concludes, "My hope is that the past and present ideas about social justice in the [JEE] serve as a rallying cry for critical pedagogy and structural reform to achieve equity, accessibility, and liberation in all aspects of [EE]" (p. 5).

goals such as character building, critical thinking, and creating a more socially just society; yet one key issue still facing both fields is the implementation of theory in practice (Breunig, 2008a). While practice should ground any theory, the "experiences" chosen within EE should be informed by a relevant theoretical framework or risk lacking intention and purpose, becoming merely play. EE is described as "experience rich but theory poor" (Breunig, 2008a, p. 469), indicating a need to develop theory in EE. Conversely, many educational theories are "theory rich but experience poor" (Eisner, as referenced in Breunig, 2008a, p. 469), calling for more specific practical instructional strategies. In a tradition such as CP with an explicit commitment to theory and practice through an action-reflection oriented praxis, this sentiment may seem misplaced. However, Breunig (2009) asserts that there is a "knowledge/action gap" (p. 260), that is, a disconnect between theory and practice evidenced by inconsistencies in pedagogical beliefs and implementation (Breunig, 2011b). I contend that EE has ample capacity to create social change, yet there is minimal evidence that experiential learning pedagogy is being employed in such a way that participants are getting the full benefits of EE's potential, particularly in regards to justice-oriented outcomes. Therefore, I am interested in how the two approaches might be integrated to create a CEP that has the potential to bridge noted shortcomings of EE and CP. I propose both developing a theoretical framework to direct practice and providing concrete examples of strategies to employ a CEP.

Significance

While I believe there is ample evidence to warrant a broad critical shift within EE theory and praxis (for example, Breunig, 2019), I hope that through a systematic review of EE's philosophical underpinnings and general theoretical framework of the romantic and pragmatic strands through a critical lens, a deconstruction, critique, and reconstruction, I both provide a

robust and explicit theory of CEP which can be utilized towards socially just ends and substantiate a critical reorientation of EE. A CEP significantly contributes to the literature in the critical strand of EE. By expanding the scope of EE to systematically employ criticality intentionally *in all strands*, we more fully exploit the potential of EE and restore hope in the democratic potential of education.

Nature of the Study

Research Design

The research design for my conceptual project is a combination of theory adaptation and theory synthesis (see Jaakkola, 2020). Conceptual research often relies on identifying or creating "gaps" in the literature that a researcher proceeds to "fill" through reasoned argumentation. However, this approach generally fails to interrogate underlying assumptions in the existing literature, leading to the under-problematizing of extant research, thus reinforcing instead of challenging dominant theories (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011). Through a critical lens, I attempt to systematically challenge assumptions of EE to move beyond "filling the gap," to both disrupt and build. First, I add to the growing discourse that is problematizing the prevailing theoretical frameworks for EE and addressing deficiencies through the application of a critical lens. Second, I aim to comprehensively describe a theory of CEP as imagined and contoured through the preceding theory adaptation. Thus, I delineate a shift in perspective of EE by informing it with a critical theory in a theory adaptation, elucidate a theoretical framework for a CEP through the integration of a critical perspective into a reconstructed EP in a theory synthesis, and explore any necessary realignments in philosophical commitments. My primary goal is to construct an applicable theory that enhances current theoretical understanding and practice in EE as expressed in an EP.

Subjectivity

I loved learning from a young age and excelled in school. Teachers and books knew so much. However, somewhere along the way, I discovered my own power: I could learn from my own experience, not just from teachers and books! Girl Scouts, summer camp, free time on field trips were great opportunities to create my own special wisdom. My first backpacking trip, to Isle Royale National Park in Lake Superior, solidified my partiality towards experiential learning. After college, I taught for two years in Tanzania as a Peace Corps Volunteer and continued to grow through experiential learning. This formative experience changed the course of my life as I decided to pursue a career in education. My next teaching role was at an outdoor experiential education program, which is likely the highlight of my teaching career. I saw students who were not academically gifted thrive in an experiential learning environment. My appreciation for the power of experiential educations has not waned over time.

In exploring past, present, and potential conceptions of EE, it is important I recognize my own stake in education and the position from which I stand. I take the stance that power, privilege, dominance, and oppression are ingrained in the fabric of society and in the systems and structures we have built that offer some opportunities while systematically marginalizing others. It is important that I acknowledge my privilege as a researcher, given a platform and empowered to discuss issues I find meaningful. I also acknowledge my historical and social context as a critical researcher. I place a great value and esteem on education, both formal and informal. I was raised with "midwestern" white Protestant values of hard work and productivity. Despite a very politically, socially, and fiscally conservative upbringing, I become more progressive year after year as I learn more about systemic oppression, the experiences of marginalized people, and how I am implicated in the perpetuation of harmful dominant

ideologies. I strive to actively dismantle racism, homophobia and transphobia, misogyny, and bigotry in any form in my personal life and professional activities by actively engaging in anti-oppressive discourses, teaching my children to be allies and activists, and attempting anti-oppressive practices in my professional life as an educator.

Owing in part to my array of privileges, conservative upbringing, and dominant ideological forces, I had neither experienced significant marginalization or barriers to my success (the system is alive and well, doing what it was designed to do), nor had I spent much effort considering systems of oppression. Of course, I knew certain groups were treated unfairly and had different opportunities than I did, but I "worked hard" and deserved my success. And then I took a course in the Cultural Foundation's department, and my world was turned upside down. I quickly saw through the lies I'd been told or created myself but struggled reconciling my complicities with ideologies that were insidiously or blatantly harmful. While my interest in EE has not dulled, I have come to recognize that first, I do not have to choose EE *or* social justice, and second, perhaps I have an obligation to expand EE's perspective the way the Cultural Foundations program has expanded mine.

Audience

The audience most likely to be immediately interested in a critical experiential theory is current scholars and practitioners of EE. There is a growing subset of researchers and practitioners who share an interest in advancing social justice through their scholarship and practice of EE (Breunig, 2016). My hope is that I can contribute to this expanding body of work in a significant way in both theory and in practical application. In a broader sense, the intended audience is educators who are currently, or are interested in, implementing an EP in their

classrooms and learning spaces in the hopes they foster and promote social justice through their work.

Definition of Terms

Despite the limited published discourse, there have been repeated calls for a "critically reflexive [EE] research agenda" (Warren, Roberts, Breunig, & Alvarez, 2014, p. 98). There are scholars and practitioners in the field of EE discussing topics of social justice, mostly from within the critical strand; however, there is a lack of consistency regarding an express commitment to critically reorient EE generally. Further, there is no shared critical framework connecting the work. Perhaps due in part to an emerging common language about how similar issues are being described, I propose the absence of a distinct theoretical framework from which this work can ground itself is a barrier to its growth. This suggests a need for an explicit theory of CEP, providing a shared framework to integrate critical pedagogy towards social justice-oriented outcomes. To provide clarity, I define (1) social justice, (2) social justice-oriented outcomes, and (3) critical reorientations as follows. (1) From Bell (2016)

> The *goal* of social justice is full and equitable participation of people from all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shared to meet their needs. The *process* for attaining the goal of social justice should also be democratic and participatory, respectful of human diversity and group differences, and inclusive and affirming of human agency and capacity for working collaboratively with others to create change. (p. 3)

(2) Education is both a process and goal – *becoming* educated, and to become *educated* – oriented towards both the present and the future and concerned with creating socially just conditions presently **and** with preparing students for democratic participation—future-oriented outcomes. I use the language of "social justice-oriented outcomes" to clarify my focus on future-

oriented outcomes, or outcomes that orient participants towards future social justice outcomes. Green (2021) uses similar language in introducing a journal issue seeking to offer new insights and strategies to apply a "justice orientation in [EE]" (p. 2). In other words, present-oriented learning outcomes may not be designed for enacting social justice in the moment; yet, future-oriented learning outcomes explicitly connect and explore social justice within expressions of EE and foster a social change orientation. This orientation strengthens the capacity within the learner to deconstruct systems of power in order to address social, political, and economic inequities. (3) Being critical both acknowledges relations of unequal power that harm and empowers agents of change for building more just societies. By critical reorientation, I mean the process of deconstruction down to fundamental assumptions, examination of each component through a critical lens, realignment of each component to be compatible with principles of social justice, and the critical reconstruction of the concept towards a whole that maintains its overall original shape but imbued critically.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

My study focuses on generating a theory of CEP by reconstructing EP with a critical lens, strengthening EE's theoretical roots and critically reorienting the theory and praxis of EE. My hope is that an explicit theoretical framework of CEE can serve as an anchor for the growing body of critically oriented discourse within the field. However, this assumes that EE, and more specifically the critical strand of EE, wants and would benefit from a well-delineated theoretical framework. There is inherent risk both in being too specific and too general. It is possible that the critical strand has intentionally skirted being too specific in a theoretical framework as to not limit or impose boundaries on what could be.

I am limited by my personal bias. I operate from the belief that we all should work towards a more equitable world that recognizes the full humanity of everyone. From this standpoint, I believe that all institutional and informal activity should be directed by this principle, that we need to engage criticality in all our reflexive experiences. My study attends to the romantic, pragmatic, and critical strands of EE; I do not undertake the normative strand, which focuses on the market and neo-experiential education (Roberts, 2005). This may minimally limit the utility of a theoretical framework of CEE and a CEP to the first three strands, but perhaps not.

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter 2, I focus on the essential characteristics of the educational philosophy of EE. I describe how EE currently defines itself and the relevance of EE within the broader educational context. By elucidating the essence of experience and differentiating between experiential education and experiential learning, I attempt to uncover necessary features to consider in an experiential praxis. I attend to EE's philosophical commitments—ontology, epistemology, and ethics—and explore EE's three main strands (Roberts, 2012), noting historical influence and current directions. In examining the strands, I uncover nuanced differences that have significant implications for praxis within each strand.

I take a critical turn in Chapter 3, exploring characteristics of critical social theories. Although there is a critical strand within EE, much of EE is not critically oriented. Further, the critical strand does not have a coherent, succinct critical framework explained in the literature. Drawing on the fundamental dimensions of EE, I demonstrate congruence of EE's underpinnings with a critical perspective and examine the essential elements of a CEE. Attempting a critical

shift, I delineate philosophical underpinnings of a CEE. My aim is to lay a foundation on which I can build a critical experiential praxis, without loss of fidelity to EE's essential elements.

Finally, I expound on EE's theoretical framework to highlight the guiding principles of a theoretical framework for a *critical* EE in Chapter 4. To connect theory to practice, I offer four examples of practice of CEP within CEE and highlight applications of the guiding principles. For experiential educators who are considering adopting a CEP, I provide some considerations to direct the analysis of their praxis. CEP offers a new perspective for not-yet-critical educators, which helps keep our praxis relevant and current. CEP offers guidelines for praxis; however, it is not prescriptive and does not offer a universal approach; critical educators also accept more variability in learning outcomes. In addition to strengthening EE's theoretical roots and critically reorienting the theory and praxis of EE, my hope is that a well-delineated theory of CEP will prove useful for critical educators to have more precise discussions and help those interested critically reorient their praxis within EE.

CHAPTER II: THE FOUNDATIONS OF EXPERINTIAL EDUCATION:

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Experiential education (EE) has been described as an educational philosophy (Itin, 1999), a methodology (Chapman, McPhee, & Proudman, 2008), and a field, an area of interest bounded by common intellectual roots (Roberts, 2012, p. 7). Within the field of EE, there are three main distinct strands of EE in practice: romantic, pragmatic, and critical (Roberts, 2012). In this chapter, I attend to the philosophical commitments—ontology, epistemology, and ethics—of EE, and I explore each strand, noting historical influence and current directions. In examining the strands, I uncover nuanced differences that have significant implications for praxis within each strand.

I draw significantly from the works of Christian Itin, Jay Roberts, and Mary Breunig for this chapter and beyond. Itin's (1999) article "Reasserting the Philosophy of [EE] as a Vehicle for Change in the 21st Century" is a primary source for the philosophical commitments of EE and lays groundwork for its theoretical framework. I found Roberts' (2005, 2008, 2012, 2016) research on differentiating between strands within EE particularly helpful to illuminate how enactments of EE can be conceptualized in many different ways while still sharing fundamental principles. Above all, Roberts' (2005, 2008, 2012) examination of varying conceptions of experience and how each strand differs based on its orientation towards notions of experience is seminal to my understanding of EE and key concepts that emerge in Chapter 2 and on which I build in Chapters 3 and 4. Throughout Chapters 2, 3, and 4, I draw heavily on Roberts as his work both differentiating the strands within EE and the distinction of experience on which the strands are based are pivotal to my work and not yet well explored elsewhere in the literature. As

a stout advocate for critical EE, Breunig's (2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2011a, 2016, 2017) work provides a foundation for EE and strengthens the bridge between EE and critical, justice-oriented outcomes, beginning in this chapter and emphasized in the next.

Although there is a critical strand within EE, much of EE is not critically oriented. Moreover, a critical framework has yet to be outlined in a coherent, succinct way. My intent in explaining the fundamental dimensions of EE in this chapter is to be able to, first, demonstrate congruence of EE's underpinnings with a critical perspective and to, second, critically reorient them towards a critical experiential praxis in the next chapter, without loss of fidelity to its essential characteristics.

What is Experiential Education?

In this section, I discuss how EE has been defined and the relevance of EE within the broader educational context. I also differentiate between experiential *education* and experiential *learning*, which are often conflated to the detriment of the EE project (Itin, 1999; Roberts, 2012). The latter, in pedagogical terms, is reducible to a method or technique (Roberts, 2012, p. 4), whereas the former is a broader process that includes the socialization and individuation (Rorty, as cited in Roberts, 2012, p 4) or subjectification (Biesta, 2010) of learners in a community. Without differentiating EE and experiential learning, we risk an "experiential" shift, from EE centering a Deweyan concept of experience, to centering experiential activity—learning-by-doing (Roberts, 2005), undermining the educational project that is "EE," which I attend to next.

Defining Experiential Education and Its Relevance

The Association of Experiential Education provides a simplified definition of EE, but it misses some critical and nuanced aspects. As such, I defer to Christian Itin's (1999) proposed definition for EE:

> [EE] is a holistic philosophy, where carefully chosen experiences supported by reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis are structured to require the learner to take initiative… and be accountable for the results, through actively posing questions, investigating… solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, constructing meaning, and integrating previously developed knowledge. Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, politically, spiritually, and physically… It challenges the learner to explore issues of values, relationship, diversity, inclusion, and community… The results of the learning form the basis of future experience and learning. (p. 93)

This definition emphasizes the holistic aspects of EE, that learning is not solely based on problem solving, but as an endeavor that inherently concerns the other in our relationships and our responsibilities. Itin (1999) makes it clear that EE must be understood as transactive in nature, that the transactions are—and part of—experiences themselves, and that EE's concern with change extends beyond the individual (p. 93). However, I have noted that much of the scholarship and practice within EE identifies 'holistic' as being oriented to the individual (see Taggart, 2001), a recurrent theme that undergirds a tension between strands of EE, which I address later[10]. Notwithstanding, Itin's definition is comprehensive and inclusive of the various forms of EE, allowing for infinite possibilities for the future.

Though not identified with holistic education per se, Dewey (1938) certainly supported the ideals of learning experientially and holistically. He critiques traditional education, noting its

[10] Focused on the individual, 'social' means the individual's connection to the other as an individual—a pair of *I*s, not a *We*. 'Political' engagement considers the learner's capacity to take action, to participate in the democratic process (Itin, 1999), which for Dewey (1985) is directed towards making a better future for society, "primarily as a mode of associated living" (p. 93). However, I posit EE takes the socialized individual to be just that—an individual first.

main objective is to transmit a known body of information, effectively indurating students[11] to learning while failing to relate the material to, or equip them to navigate, their lives. Dewey (1938) suggests an essential question for education is "ascertaining how acquaintance with the past may be translated into a potent instrumentality for dealing effectively with the future" (p. 23). As I will demonstrate, EE provides an educational framework for connecting past experiences to future growth. I discuss the essence of experience in the section that follows.

Dewey (1938) asserts that any sound educational philosophy should center continuity and interaction of experience, incorporating past knowledge into constructed knowledge to engage with present and future situations within the context of our lives. The principle of continuity—that all experiences draw on previous ones and impact the quality of future ones—relies on quality experiences to stimulate curiosity or create intrinsic motivation; experiences can be mis-educative if they arrest or distort future growth (Dewey, 1938). All of our personal experiences necessarily impact our perspective, thoughts, actions, and reactions in future experiences. Thus, Dewey (1938) concludes, "Every experience is a moving force" (p. 38). The principle of interaction holds that we exist only in the world in a series of situated experiences, and experiences are impacted by internal and external factors (Dewey, 1938). "An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment" (p. 43), which consists of "whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had" (Dewey,

[11] Note, throughout this work I use the terms educator, teacher, and facilitator interchangeably, depending on the context. I do likewise for the terms student, learner, and participant. This is also reflected in the quotes I use from various authors, especially within the field of EE. While each has a different association, I hope the transposable use throughout the paper allows experiential educators within different contexts to better relate to the ideas presented.

1938, p. 44), for example, a toy, a book, a conversation, or materials used in an experiment. Students need opportunities to be in direct contact with phenomena relevant to the areas being studied, "not to read or see what someone else thinks about [it], but to really have the students make sense of it for themselves" (Bobilya & Daniel, 2011, p. 78). While reading is a valuable form of experience, learning other people's ideas on a topic does not help the learner develop confidence in their own ideas. Rather, the process of meaning making, including the struggle to understand something, is part of the knowing itself (Duckworth, as referenced in Bobilya & Daniel, 2011). In a very important sense, the experience becomes a resource offered, guided, or arranged by the teacher.

Thus, experience is a foundational aspect of education. EE centers the students' experiences in the education process, ultimately helping students develop habits of mind that include observation and reflection. Understood as predispositions to act, not patterns of action (Biesta, 2010, p. 39), habits of observation and reflection involve "thought, invention, and initiative in applying capacities" towards knowledge creation and growth (Dewey, 1985, p. 59). This reflective capacity has the potential to take possibly mundane undertakings and elevate them to experiences which become the genesis for growth (Breunig, 2008a; Itin, 1999; Roberts, 2008). This mode of questioning can be harnessed, through the formation of habits, to more deeply consider and critique the world in which we live to the betterment of the individual and society.

The Essence of Experience

The concept of "experience" is clearly important to EE, yet the educative power of experience is curiously "the single *least* interrogated concept in the field" (Roberts, 2012, p. 8). While elucidating what constitutes experience philosophically is outside the scope of this project,

Dewey (1958) notes, "Philosophies have too often tried to forego the actual work that is involved in penetrating the true nature of experience" (p. xi). Dewey (1958) attempts to explicate experience by noting experience depends on objective physical and social events and is not necessarily experienced "by" someone; yet, when one assumes "ownership" of an experience, it marks a new relationship in which the experience acquires new properties and responsibilities.

> Experience, a serial course of affairs with their own characteristic properties and relationships, occurs, happens, and is what it is… To say in a significant way, "*I* think, believe, desire, instead of barely *it* is thought, believed, desired," is to accept and affirm a responsibility and to put forth a claim. (italics in original, Dewey, 1958, p. 232-233)

Dewey attempts to generalize the term experience beyond what is encountered by an individual, that "experience is *of* as well as *in* nature" (p. 4a). Further, experience "involves contact and communication" (Dewey, 1938, p. 38). That is, experience is always both internal (experienced *by*) and external (what is experienced). This demonstrates that there is responsibility and connectedness inherent in experience, and thus, inherent in education if experience is a necessary component of education.

Experience, as used in EE, deals with "particulars rather than universals" (Roberts, 2012, p. 14) and is a "complex, constructed 'reality'" (Fox, 2008, p. 39); experience is not "raw, unreflected sensation or unmediated observation" (Roberts, 2012, p. 13), divorced from consciousness. That is, experience focuses on specific matters that are personal and incommutable, in contrast to un-reflected or unmediated sensation or observation that is sometimes collective and interchangeable. Dewey (1958) distinguishes between primary and secondary experiences, in that primary experiences can be incidental, but secondary experiences are the "consequence of continued and regulated reflective inquiry, [and] are experienced only

because of the intervention of systematic thinking" (p. 4). Dewey offers that experience is activity in which "we act upon [something], we do something with it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences"; yet "mere activity does not constitute experience" (Dewey, 1985, p. 146). Primary experiences are the initial action, our lived experiences undertaken with intentionality, and secondary—or "reflective experience" (Dewey, 1958, p. 4)—experiences are what we do with the primary experience. Secondary experiences are essential to the learning process in EE.

Dewey (1985) advocates for democratic education harnessing the power of experience. Vernon (2016) distinguishes between Dewey's two uses of the word *experience*: *an* experience understood as an occurrence mediated by interaction and continuity (Dewey, 1938), noted above, and experience-as-culture as the "historical and contemporary 'constellated and concerted complexity with our ongoing interaction with a world still in the process of becoming'" (Vernon, 2016, p. 300). Vernon (2016) suggests that Dewey advocated for education as a site to interrupt and challenge experience-as-culture through a dialectical, iterative process in order to incite social change.

Roberts (2008) describes three variations of experience: the interactive experience, the embodied experience, and the experience-as-praxis. The distinction of experience becomes important because the three main theoretical strands of EE—romantic, pragmatic, and critical, introduced in Chapter 1—differentiate themselves in part by how they frame the role of experience in the educational process. The interactive experience, drawn from pragmatism, is generated through the awareness of and sustained attention on activity. Knowledge is generated from active, contextual, and relational experience that allows for contingency. Pragmatic in nature, education that employs interactive experience seeks to continually reconstruct experience in a way that "adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases the ability to direct the

course of subsequent experience" (Dewey, 1985, p. 82). A form of associated living, learning from this type of experience is intended towards social harmony (Roberts, 2008).

Distinct from the interactive notion of experience that insists lived experience is relational and transactional, the embodied experience locates experience within the individual. Drawing on Romanticism and phenomenology, experience is direct corporal sensations, which are subjective to the self and their body. Focused on the Romantic notion of individual meaning-making and transformation, experience emphasizes the extraordinary over the mundane (Roberts, 2008); lived experiences—those experienced corporally—are individualized and transcendent (Taggart, 2001). Experience is "real" because we sense and live through it, which is also what makes it special, first as an individual and then as a social being (Roberts, 2008, p. 25).

Experience-as-praxis[12], emerging from critical theory, is "embedded within the dynamics of power and social change" (Roberts, 2008, p. 27). Whereas the interactive or embodied notions of experience view experience as uncorrupted by structural inequality within social relationships, experience-as-praxis is more politically oriented, in that experience is considered to be either a tool for the reproduction of inequalities or a "means for counter-hegemonic emancipation" (Roberts, 2008, p. 27). Instead of being employed towards the ends of social harmony (interactive) or self-actualization (embodied), experience-as-praxis is used to cultivate a critical consciousness to expose systems and structures of oppression and a propensity towards just action. Yet, through the use of grand narratives (Roberts, 2008)—a universalized account of reality, this construction of experience risks diminishing individual agency, creating a barrier for translating theory into practice.

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[12] Praxis is "a spiral in which critical reflection and action continuously inform each other in the service of individual and personal transformation" (Villaverde, 2007, p. 5).

Experiential Education Versus Experiential Learning

"Experiential education" and "experiential learning"[13] are often used interchangeably in literature and in practice (Itin, 1999). This conflation hampers our ability to discuss clearly what we mean by EE. For Dewey, experience is at the heart of the educational process and should not be a technical application. In some enactments of EE, there has been a shift from "experience" to "experiential"; that is, experience becomes technically applied, rationally constructed, tightly bound in time and space, and efficiently controlled (Roberts, 2005). This is part of a larger critique of experiential learning theory, which claims to share the underpinnings of EE; yet as it has developed over the years has decoupled from its roots in EE as a social practice and ideology, it has become more focused on technical issues (Seaman, Brown, & Quay, 2017). The result is a subversion of experience to something controllable and controlling, leaving it susceptible to cooptation and commodification (Roberts, 2008). Roberts (2005) warns this "experiential" shift is harmful to the democratic potential of "experience" as fun-yet-disconnected experiences diminish individual autonomy, bounded in social interaction. When experiences are void of connected meaning, we are in danger of producing a society unconscious

[13] EL theory traces its roots to social psychologist Kurt Lewin in the 1940's (Seaman, Brown, & Quay, 2017). Stemming from human relations training groups, these trainings incorporated role-playing and discussion groups to aid people working conjointly to solve issues of social conflict and local governance. Participants contributed to the training design, orienting them as change agents within their communities. Increasingly influenced by humanistic psychology, t-groups became a template for other programs which used "emotionally intense, small group interactions in retreat-like settings as vehicles for generating reactions that signified personal authenticity and relational closeness" (Seaman et al., 2017, p. NP7). This turn centered long-range personal development as programmatic outcomes and a moral orientation. EL theory's history has impacted how EE manifests in practice and helps explain individualistic orientations within strands of EE that diverge from Dewey's conception of education.

of the meaning of, or connections to, their service to themselves and their communities (Roberts, 2005). I have noted four key distinctions between EE and EL in the literature.

Adherence to Tenets of Experiential Education

Experiential pedagogy (EP) centers experience in the learning process. Reflection and its outcomes lead to change; however, learning is deeper when it generates connections to the self, others, and the world, allowing for future applications. With this in mind, EL is most often described as a cyclical process that involves (1) engagement in an experience, (2) reflection, (3) abstraction or generalization, and (4) application or extension (e.g., Kolb, 1984). A key distinction between EE and EL is that EL can be captured in an abstract model, independent of the context of the values of an educational philosophy (Higgins & Nicol, 2011). In a sense, many EL activities can be "cut and pasted" to other contexts (Beames et al., 2012). Yet, EE is always contextualized by values (Itin, 1999). Since EL creates an experience based on which symbolic and metaphoric learning can more firmly attach (Roberts, 2012; Gass, 2008), experiential educators regularly implement EL in their practice, in addition to other methods.

Individual Versus Relational Learning

According to Itin (1999), "[EL] is best considered as the change in an individual" (p. 92). Biesta (2010) is concerned with the language of 'learning', that "'learning' is basically an *individualistic* concept" (p. 18). He continues, "This stands in stark contrast to the concept of 'education' that always implies a *relationship*: someone educating someone else and the person educating having a certain sense of the purpose of [their] activities" (p. 18). Thus, experiential *learning* can be thought of as a pedagogical tool to facilitate the educational process but can be used independently. Experiential *education*, on the other hand, is transactive in nature and always acknowledges that learning—"education" for Biesta—is contextualized by relationships;

there is interaction "between learners, between learner and teacher, and between the learner and [their] environment" (Itin, 1999, p. 93).

Conception of Experience

Another crucial difference is the conception and application of experience. Within EL, "experience is tightly bounded (in both time and space) and efficiently controlled. Experience becomes not organic, interactive, and continuous but rather a scripted, timed, and located 'activity'" (Roberts, 2012, p. 5). Experience loses its holistic nature as it becomes confined and structured (Itin, 1999, p. 92). The boundedness may also cause issues with Dewey's (1938) principles of continuity and interaction. Further, when we amalgamate EE and EL, we risk equating EE with a teaching method, a "useful tool in the hands of the teacher—something to be employed in small chunks, but not functionally altering the broader purposes and aims of education" (Roberts, 2012, p. 5). In EE, learning is not an end in itself, rather a means for transformation. Thus, in conflating we dilute the potential potency of EE and its transformational pedagogy.

Intentionality of Integrating Experience

While learning through experience may occur by happenstance, EE is distinguished from EL in that it employs the conscious application of experience—whether a directed experience, in the field, a contrived activity, or day-to-day living—to teach and learn (Warren, Mitten & Loeffler, 2008). For example, I twist my ankle while hiking. Limping along, I reflect on choices that led to my injury and observe my poor choice of footwear. I then think about other activities I have undertaken in my current footwear and consider possible injuries I could sustain as a consequence, and I realize my choice is important to the success and enjoyment of various physical activities. In the future, I will more carefully choose appropriate footwear. In this

example, I have completed an EL cycle, but it lacked intentionality and a transactive relationship; thus, I have not engaged in EE. While the role of the facilitator is indispensable in EE, one important objective within an EP is helping students become autonomous, self-directed learners. In the example, I suggest the completion of the experiential cycle, indicating autonomous learning, signified by the awareness of well-defined experiences and engagement in critical reflection without an external guide. Thus, through the intentional integration of experience in education, the experiential pedagogue is preparing future EL opportunities to exist outside of any formal or informal education.

The definitions of EE and EL have evolved over the years, yet the essential elements have endured throughout the iterations. Although there is extensive research available on certain uses of EL, especially service learning and outdoor education, there is ample opportunity for research in other applications of the educational philosophy. Additionally, gaps exist within the literature detailing the use of EL techniques used to teach content-based courses, such as math, beyond training teachers on these subjects. Understanding the context of EE within the broader context of education, the essence of experience as utilized in EE, and the distinctions of EE and EL foreground the underpinnings of EE, which I attend to next.

Philosophical Commitments of Experiential Education

As previously noted, the strands of EE are differentiated by their notion of experience, and thus have varying theoretical frameworks; however, all experiential educators share similar philosophic fidelity[14] (Itin, 1999; Roberts, 2012). Before I explore the three strands, I attend to

[14] I differentiate between "philosophy" and "theory" in that a philosophy describes the philosophical commitments of any practice within the field, the foundational understandings of knowledge, being, and values from which all else proceeds. A theoretical framework incorporates a model for conceptualizing the operationalization of the philosophy and/or

the philosophical underpinnings of EE. A comprehensive definition of a philosophy of EE requires consensus among the various subfields of EE. Due to great diversity within the field, a single definition is difficult and perhaps impossible (Smith & Knapp, 2011). Yet, there is enough consistency in the theory of practice among experiential educators to outline foundational beliefs (Itin, 1999; Roberts, 2012), a discussion of which follows.

As noted, EE is grounded in pragmatic thought, stemming from Dewey's general philosophic frame (Crosby, 2008). EE is also generally considered to be rooted in progressivism, an educational philosophic frame usually based on a theoretical framework of constructivism, concerned with how learners construct knowledge from experience, reflection, and experimentation (Smith & Knapp, 2011). As a philosophy of education, EE draws from an assortment of other philosophical paradigms, such as reconstructionism, humanism, and existentialism (Roberts, 2012; Smith & Knapp, 2011).

Epistemologically, EE contends knowledge is created or co-created through experience and reflection, and knowledge becomes a tool for acting in the world (Seaman, in Smith, Knapp, Seaman, & Pace, 2011). EE honors numerous ways of knowing and constructing knowledge, including cognitively, emotionally, socially, physically, and spiritually (Carver, 1996; Itin, 1999). Further, knowledge is not static, and 'truth' is neither universal nor fixed. As implied in the name, EE centers experience in the educational process and connects the learner's current learning to future experiences and learning (Itin, 1999). EE also values the process of learning as much as the content or products (Carver, 1996).

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methodology and provides a system to organize concepts and "a structure for thinking about overarching goals, specific objectives, activities… [and] expectations for student experience" (Carver, 1996, p. 12).

Based on Aristotle's organizing metaphysical principle of change from potentiality to actuality (Crosby, 2008), Dewey's assertion of antifoundationalism (Kadlec, 2007), and drawing from Maxine Greene's work, we can understand EE metaphysically as "an internal process by which people can 'wake up' and construct a coherent world for one's question for freedom and transformation by integrating a variety of perspectives" (Frank, 2011, p. 70). EE helps students

> wake up to the world and start seeing if from a variety of vantage points… [This] can occur when we come together with others to authentically ask questions and choose to act. Humans have the unique "capacity to surpass the given and look at things as if they could be otherwise." (Greene, as cited in Frank, 2011, p. 67)

Through reflective and dialectic practice, a learner may come to view the world and their experiences in it through different lenses, enhancing their ability to reinterpret or reimagine what could be, liberating a new potential range of actions—new beginnings. For Greene, this power of the possible is rooted in the idea of freedom (Frank, 2011). EE is empowering because the learner becomes the author of what is learned and utilizes their own capacity to establish and shape their own reality. In this sense, EE is a path towards freedom and any number of potential realities.

EE takes an existential approach to its ontology, presuming individuals are responsible for discerning their own notions of truth and the meaning of life and, ultimately, their authentic being (Smith & Knapp, 2011). Correlatively, students are encouraged to understand personal responsibility corresponding to their personal choices. Axiologically, existentialism is consistent with pragmatism in that both agree values are never external, that humans produce values.

A philosophy of EE embraces the centrality of experience in the learning process, is holistic and transactive in nature, and results in increased participation in the democratic process.

Experience is always contextualized, and education is a political endeavor and is understood as situated within a larger socio-political-economic context.

Experiential Education's Theoretical Framework

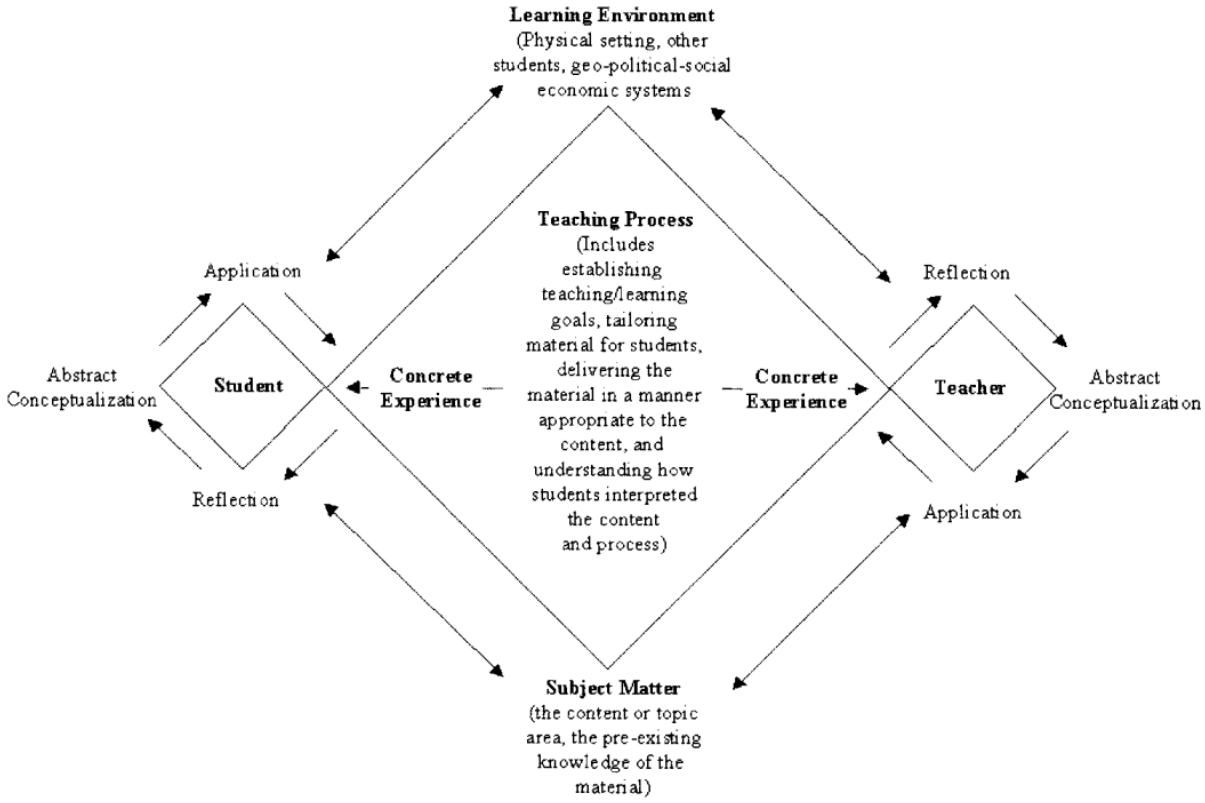
EE's theoretical framework draws on different disciplines, among them philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and cognitive science (Carver, 1996, p. 8). EE is more impactful when multiple modalities of being in the world are engaged, physical, emotional, cognitive, social, even spiritual. Moreover, students can engage in philosophical, psychological, sociological, educational, political, legal, and ethical considerations through their experiences and reflections (Carver, 1996, p. 8). While applications of EE vary greatly in their processes, four pedagogical principles are common elements of each: ensuring authenticity, incorporating active learning, drawing on student experience, and providing mechanisms for connecting experience to future opportunities (Carver, 1996, p. 10).

Carver (1996) provides a theoretical framework for EE which includes the concepts of agency, belonging, and competence. Centering student experience contextualized by the learning environment, these three concepts form a general theoretical framework from which we organize ideas about curricular development, outcomes, methods, evaluation, and other educational aspects. It provides a structure to consider curriculum holistically, whether for classroom-, program-, or community-based education, yet does not insinuate details about the concepts or contexts that constitute its substance.

Building on framework, a model provides a visual representation that allows for examination of principles within a theory (Itin, 1999). Building on the principles in Carver's (1996) theoretical framework, Itin (1999) offers a model which theoretically understands EE as a philosophy. The Diamond Model of the Philosophy of EE (see Figure 1) underscores the

transactive and cyclical process of learning between four principal systems: teacher, student, subject, and learning environment, and highlights the flow of influence within the process. "This model does not dictate or reflect a specific teaching approach or strategy; rather it allows for the many possible approaches that might be used within this model" (Itin, 1999, p. 95). The teaching process is a fifth concept in the framework that greatly impacts the teacher and student. It is important to note that EE's philosophy does not dictate a specific teaching method, any method used must observe the tenets of EE as described above.

Figure 1. The Diamond Model of the Philosophy of EE



Some teaching strategies appear more conducive to EL and thus more suited to EE; for example, lecturing stands out as not being 'experiential.' However, the philosophy of EE allows us to reject the dualistic thinking about teaching being *experiential* or *not* (Itin, 1999, p. 96).

Within this framework, teachers may employ multiple strategies within a lesson, even lecturing, and still approach teaching from an experiential mindset. While perhaps appropriate for a theory to recommend a particular teaching strategy and even specific approaches within the strategy, it is not required. EE's framework provides a way to conceptualize the learning process as experiential (Itin, 1999), regardless of which orientation towards experience—interactive, embodied, or critical—is adopted, or in which strand EE is practiced, which I now consider.

The Strands of Experiential Education

Roberts (2012) outlines four theoretical strands within EE, each supported by their own theoretical framework, which in turn informs the practice and general focus of outcomes within a praxis. Although the frameworks overlap and interact, a major distinction between them is how each conceptualizes the construction of experience (Roberts, 2012). In this sense, "experience" itself becomes a theory. While all theoretical orientations within the field of EE commit to an experiential paradigm as described above via ontological, epistemological, and ethical assumptions, differing facets lead to a variety of practical implications. This variation of praxis is one reason EE is such a rich field. Communication of scholars and practitioners within and between the various orientations is essential to maintain intellectual diversity and integrity (Breunig, 2010; Roberts, 2012), without which EE risks losing relevance and becoming dogmatic.

Roberts (2012) describes four orientations within EE: the romantic focused on the individual; the pragmatic focused on the social; the critical focused on the political; and the normative focused on the market. Forming the main theoretical influences within EE, Roberts lists them roughly in order of their evolution, which coincides with the breadth of each

orientations' development and the frequency of its use. In my project, I am going to focus on the main three: the romantic, pragmatic, and critical strands[15].

The Romantic Strand

The romantic tradition, with proponents such as Rousseau, Emerson, and Muir, centers nature in the learning process. Examples of activities within the romantic strand of EE include expedition courses, adventure education, outdoor education, ropes courses, and environmental education. However, Roberts (2012) questions the transferability of transformative experiences that happen in nature to everyday reality. This pathway situates learning in the individual; therefore, any benefits of transformation are less valuable to society as a whole: knowledge is created within an individual instead of within a community.

Historical Roots

Romanticism can broadly be understood as a counter-movement, as a reaction to the ideas and values of Enlightenment (Hay, as referenced in Roberts, 2012). Of particular importance, the romantic tradition eschews modernity's insistence of objective reasoning as the pinnacle of the human experience, in favor of the holistic nature of being, as thinking, feeling, imaginative individuals. Starting with Rousseau's (1762) *Emile*, education in the romantic strand frees learners from the corrupting process of socialization and the "complex relations of power

[15] Roberts (2012) notes that the normative strand is less of a theoretical perspective that consciously employs a certain notion of experience, as the romantic, pragmatic, and critical are, and more of a consequence of a conception of experience shaped by modernization and rationalization. Conceived of as neo-experientialism (Roberts, 2005), "experience" becomes a taken-for-granted concept, a commodity transferable in time and place. "The individual is a rational consumer presented with choices. Experience itself becomes a consumable product… Neo-experiential frameworks 'commodify' experiences as an individual choice" (Roberts, 2008, p. 95). Experience becomes something to manage, control, and contain for reliable outcomes. Learning experience and/or praxis within any of the strands is susceptible to a normative move without vigilance. Thus, I have chosen to forgo this strand in my analysis.

and dependence" (Rorty, as cited in Roberts, 2012) introduced by direct instruction. Instead, students learn from experience and the consequences of their actions, guided by their own interests and overseen by teachers. Attempting to enact the ideas in *Emile*, Pestalozzi advocated for direct experience, observation, and reflection to empower learners, engaging students holistically, mind, body, and affect (Smith, 2011a); the teacher's role becomes providing the freedom necessary for students to experiment and follow their innate curiosity and inclinations (Roberts, 2012).

Eventually, the notion of "natural" shifted from intrinsic traits to extrinsic: Nature. This move coupled Nature—the outdoors—with experience, which is still at the heart of this strand of EE. Knowledge is constructed through experience and becomes the onus for transformation, therefore experience-in-Nature is necessary for personal growth. Romantic Transcendentalism, with proponents like Emerson, dichotomized Nature (as freeing and transformative) with culture (as constraining and corruptive) (Roberts, 2012). Thus, the path to social reform comes not through schooling, embedded with cultural indoctrination, but through individualized experiences in Nature. The romantic strand maintains an element of rebellion against Enlightenment's notions of reasoning and intelligence, centering experience in nature against the status quo of traditional education.

Case Study

Kercheval et al. (2022) study the impact of an outdoor orientation program on incoming medical students. Research demonstrates outdoor orientation programs bolsters self-esteem and leadership and social skills (Bell et al., cited in Kercheval, 2022). Somewhat common at the undergraduate level, this type of program is quite rare for medical schools. Students participated in a three day, two night backpacking trip that included team-building activities, mindfulness

training, and outdoor skills lessons. Post assessments included a survey after the trip and a focus group a year later. Results showed participants believed the program eased their transition to medical school, helped establish a support system, and assisted honing resilience and personal wellness skills. While mixed methods research may not be the norm in EE, this type of program exemplifies activities within the romantic strand. Findings from Kercheval et al.'s (2022) study align with similar outdoor orientation programs[16], which have been documented to produce community-building and personal growth outcomes.

Current Literature

In the romantic strand, much of the literature in previous decades has focused on the individual and their individual social identities (Warren, Roberts, Breunig, & Alvarez, 2014). While there is some research in this strand that concerns itself with social justice (e.g. Brooks, Braun, & Prince 2022), centering individual benefits prevails. Both short term and long term effects are studied, with findings ranging from improved short-term mental health (Bettmann, Anderson, Makouske, & Hanley, 2022) to positive impacts on personal awareness, professional life, and environmental connection (Ramírez & Allison, 2023). Little scholarship critically examines outcomes beyond a basic recognition of needing to be culturally inclusive (Frazer, 2009). In other words, programming may focus on diversity—who participates—and not on how individuals develop a more socially just orientation. There is a small, but growing, cadre of researchers within the romantic strand who are calling for more attention to ways in which EE intersects with issues of social and environmental justice (Gauthier, Joseph, & Fusco, 2021;

[16] Some participants expressed that the challenges faced in the program are not analogous to those in medical school (Kercheval et al., 2022). A common critique of the romantic strand is that programs divorced from the everyday experience of students produce outcomes that may not transfer to everyday life.

Warren et al., 2014). Although there are shared philosophical commitments, the pragmatic strand shares little of the romantic penchant for the individual-in-nature.

The Pragmatic Strand

For advocates of the pragmatic tradition, such as Dewey, "knowledge is a product of context and social interaction; truth is communal" (Michalec, 2012, p. 1). So, while both Romantics and Pragmatists agree experience is the best teacher, through a different conception of experience—understood as social and transactional in orientation—the pragmatic strand differs greatly from the romantic. Examples of EE activity within the pragmatic strand include service learning, study abroad, internships, and undergraduate research experiences.

Historical Roots

Both American pragmatism and progressivism undergird the pragmatic strand of EE. Pragmatism is a school of philosophical thought; progressivism can be thought of as a socio-political movement founded on a set of ideals creating a more just and equitable society, manifesting around the same time as pragmatism. Educational progressivism translates pragmatic philosophy into schooling (Roberts, 2012). Pragmatism is founded on the ideas of Pierce and James in the 1870s, and furthered by Dewey and Mead. A basic assumption of pragmatism, experience should be used to explore the world and be considered by its practical consequences. Meaning is constructed when thought and action interact—or trans-act—revising each other, through experience and reflection. Moreover, experience can only be realized through transaction with others, and is thus a social act. This is a major epistemological shift, from knowing being of the mind to being created through "indefinite interactions taking place within a course of nature which is not fixed and complete" (Dewey, as cited in D'Agnese, 2017, p. 83). The interaction and antifoundationalism are what make experience necessarily social.

Case Study

Garwood et al. (2023) reviewed research on the experiences of students with disabilities actively participating in service learning, instead of passively receiving the service. They define service learning as field-based activities that link curricula with a community need, promoting learning and community engagement. Previous analyses determined students with disabilities can benefit from active participation in service learning activities, yet very little of the research included experimental design[17]. Garwood et al.'s meta-analysis found only thirteen studies in electronic databases that report qualitative or quantitative results. However, overall findings were consistently positive, including increased prosocial behavior, empathy for the needs of others, cooperation skills, and relationship development with community members. This wide array of constructive outcomes indicates that service learning is a potentially powerful tool for learning for students with disabilities.

Current Literature

There is a plethora of research in some expressions of EE in this strand, particularly service learning (Mitchell, 2008), and a growing body in others, such as study abroad (Kelly & Clevenger, 2021). As this orientation of EE is always socially contextualized, literature generally reports on outcomes that inherently address the "other," such as empathy, interaction, perspective transformation, communication, cultural awareness, and value sharing (Backman, Pitt, Marsden, Mehmood, & Mathijs, 2019; Kelly & Clevenger, 2021). Similar to the romantic strand, but even more so, scholars in the pragmatic orientation are calling for more critical

[17] Notably, much research in EE utilizes anecdotal evidence or offers program summaries while omitting methodological details (Garwood et al., 2023).

consideration of how programs are implemented and to what end (Mitchell, 2008; Small & Varker, 2021).

Romantic Versus Pragmatic

Sharing philosophical underpinnings, expressions of EE within the romantic and pragmatic strands different significantly across one major facet: contextualizing experience individually or socially. For Romantics, experience stood in contrast to abstract intellectualism, embodied "experience" vs rational thought. Nature is outside of social context, thus experience can be decontextualized, individualized, and not necessarily understood through consequence (which has social consequences, not just individual consequences). Pragmatists, however, view experience as the bridge between the personal and the abstract, a way to theorize about the world, to create a true account of the world at large. Within the pragmatic strand, it is assumed that education is meant to prepare students for active citizenship and engagement in their communities for the benefit of everyone in the community. This already sets the pragmatic strand apart from the romantic strand in that it focuses on the community and not the individual decontextualized from their community.

The Critical Strand

Supported by works of critical pedagogues such as Freire and hooks (Breunig, 2019), the critical tradition of EE "views experience through the lens of power, either as tool for reproducing inequalities or as a means for emancipation" (Roberts, 2012, p. 69). At its core, the critical practitioner examines the pragmatist's dilemma, operating under the assumption that planned experiences must be critiqued as they can actually devalue students' everyday lived experiences and replace "self-agency with predetermined, market-driven forms of knowledge" (Michalec, 2012, p. 1). Yet, experiences, such as the use of storytelling as a method of self-

empowerment and social critique, can also offer liberation in our current undemocratic schooling practices. We can think of critical enactments of EE as countercurrents in the river of EE (Roberts, 2012). Examples include critical service learning, critical outdoor EE, and critical study abroad.

Historical Roots

In response to the emerging zeitgeist of the early twentieth century, social critics of the rise of Nazism, capitalism, positivism, and mass culture formed the Frankfurt School, the genesis of critical social theories (Agger, 2013). Scholars were attempting to understand how working class people seemed oblivious of the oppressive systems in which they not only suffered, but willingly participated, lacking a shared sense of struggle (Roberts, 2012). Critical theorists concern themselves with the ways in which power, politics, and ideology imbue our perceptions and analyses of our world. Within the critical strand, experience is thus never seen as neutral—it can never "speak for itself." Experience is always shaped by power and ideology and will serve hegemonic purposes if we are not attentive[18]. According to White, any genuinely critical theory will "cultivate a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' and view 'social structures of inequality' as manifestations of power relations" (as cited in Kadlec, 2007, p. 14). Thus, enactments of EE within the critical tradition must be imbibed with questioning, always within the context of power relations. Owing to his attention to education as a mechanism to combat systemic inequities, Freire is Dewey's counterpart within the critical strand of EE (Roberts, 2012; Breunig, 2008b). Freire proposed a problem-posing approach, which brings experience into dialogue, collapsing the false dichotomies of experience and cognition, teacher and student, and

[18] Note here Gramsci's influence on EE in the critical strand (Roberts, 2012).

the “classroom” and the “world.” Many more recent and contemporary scholars, such as hooks, Warren, and Breunig, have built on the historical roots.

Case Study

Brooks, Braun, and Prince (2022) explore, via critical ethnography, how equity-focused outdoor experiential environmental education integrates conversations about power and privilege to develop critical consciousness and how this conscientization impels praxis. Comprised of critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action, critical consciousness is the ability to analyze experiences within socio-historical and political contexts and enact change. Developing a critical consciousness involves cultivating a questioning mindset critical of the socio-historical contexts of experiences, couched within the power relations inherent in the broader systems and structures of society; further, a critical consciousness leads to transformative action (Brooks, Braun & Prince, 2022). This cycle of reflection and action is Freirean (1970) praxis. Authors found when facilitators were involved in the strategic planning of their training and training featured inclusive practices that were taught, mentored, and modeled, facilitators were more likely to demonstrate a critical consciousness when working with their participants.

Current Literature

Discussions about issues of social justice in EE have been present in the literature for at least the last 40 years; topics addressed include gendered issues, meeting the needs of special populations, critical perspectives, and EE as a catalyst for social change (Warren, 2019). Scholars in the critical strand start from a position that teaching and learning must be dialogic and practitioners must teach to transgress (Breunig, 2019). Thus, research offers rationales, evidence of efficacy, and ideas for interweaving strategies to produce socially just outcomes into outdoor education, service learning, camps, study abroad, teacher education, and many other

types of programming (Warren, 2019). Teaching in EE is not meant to be prescriptive; ideas within the literature are meant to be open and flexible, not necessarily reproducible. Similar to other pedagogies within the critical traditions, critical EE scholars often invite more questions than provide answers; yet, all share the urgency to inspire critical reflection and action towards building a more inclusive and just society.

Romantic Versus Critical

Both the romantic and critical traditions of EE believe that schooling indoctrinates students; as a consequence, students accept conformity over individuality, and agree that "it is through awareness and understanding of the self that one comes to awareness and understanding of others" (Smith, 2011a, p. 30). From a critical perspective, humans mature by accepting their responsibility *in* and *to* society, becoming socially involved. Critical experiential educators reject the main focus on the individual of the romantics, insisting the individual become aware of their responsibility to society and the need to create a just society.

Pragmatic Versus Critical

On the surface, it seems the pragmatic and critical strand are very nearly aligned, both focused on the social and experience always contextualized in a broader milieu. For Dewey, within the context of experience-as-culture, one purpose of reflection is "to be conscious of the layers of cultures weaved [into] observations" (Miettinen, 2000, p. 63). Recall Dewey supports education as a site to interrupt and challenge experience-as-culture through a dialectical, iterative process in order to incite social change (Vernon, 2016). However, critiques of practice in the pragmatic tradition, including from Noddings and Greene, include issues of unequal power and identity de-formation found in social experiences in school. This creates a dilemma for the

pragmatist around “democratic schooling” and notions of power, equality, and justice (Roberts, 2012).

Conclusion

I outlined the foundations of EE in this chapter in order to understand what are the essential characteristics of any enactment of EE, especially as it is enacted in the different strands. In the last chapter, I address the gaps between critical enactments of EE and those within the romantic and pragmatic strands. In the next chapter, I make explicit the fundamental commitments of the critical EE project and its theoretical framework.

CHAPTER III: THE FOUNDATIONS OF A CRITICAL EXERIENTIAL PEDAGOGY

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated the transformative potential of experiential education (EE) by harnessing the power of experience—especially reflection—to develop habits of mind to more deeply consider and critique the world in which we live. In what follows, I explore characteristics of critical social theories, particularly critical pedagogies, in order to discern foundational commitments and aspects of theory and practice that are similar to EE, those that are desirable that may potentially induce a critical reorientation. Next, I consider the philosophical underpinnings of EE and experiential pedagogy (EP) with a critical lens. My goal of this chapter is to explore EE's critical compatibility, as exemplified in the critical strand (see Chapter 2), in order to uncover the essential elements of a critical experiential education (CEE) and to expound the philosophical foundations of a CEE and a critical experiential pedagogy (CEP).

What is a Critical Orientation and a Critical Lens?

The term *critical* is conceptualized and used in two different ways, which emphasize different purposes (Bermudez, 2015). The first version involves *critical thinking*, as in critical inquiry or analysis, the essence of which is suspended judgment (Dewey, 1997, p. 74). There are two layers of analysis: (1) analysis of processes of knowledge construction and communication, and (2) analysis of the social relationships and practices—that is, existing systems and structures (Bermudez, 2015). In this conception of critical, action and reflection can be understood as neutral acts. The second use applies a *critical lens* to critical analysis in that there exists an underlying assumption that inquiry (1) deconstructs the "power relationships that frame knowledge, revealing bias, hidden assumptions, propaganda and ideological manipulation, and empower[s] students to construct their own knowledge," and (2) reveals and explains the "deep

structural forces that regulate societies, [and seeks] to empower students to transform dehumanizing and oppressive realities" (Bermudez, 2015, p. 105). Throughout this project, I use the term *critical* in the second understanding, that being critical (1) acknowledges relations of unequal power that harm and (2) empowers agents of change for building more just societies. Being critically *oriented* means that analysis will always adopt a critical *lens*. Becoming critically oriented—that is, developing critical consciousness—then entails two symbiotic parts of critical analysis: critical reflection and critical action (Brooks, Braun, & Prince, 2022). By critical reflection I mean that a critical lens will always be applied to the process of knowledge creation, contextualizing analysis within socio-historically situated power relations. By critical action I mean learners become empowered and motivated to transform society towards a just, humanizing reality—becoming critical change agents[19]. This cycle of critical reflection and action is the Freirean (1970) idea of praxis, a foundational concept in critical pedagogies.

Critical social pedagogies utilize many different methods and processes within an education framework to implement outcomes, for example EL, critical reflection, ethnography, and autoethnography. For critical pedagogues, teaching is an inherently political act and issues of social justice and democracy are not distinct from acts of teaching and learning (Giroux, 2011).

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[19] Frank (2011) discusses Maxine Greene's (1988) concept of the social dimension of freedom that brings Sartre's notion of freedom into the inter-subjective realm of community (p. 68). Shedding light on 'negative freedom,' "the right not to be interfered with or coerced or compelled to do what they did not choose to do" (Greene 1988, as cited in Frank, 2011, p. 68), Greene considers true freedom to be a social act, a dialectic praxis in which individuals come together to transform reality, "a transformation of that situation to the end of overcoming oppressiveness and domination. There must be collective self-reflection; there must be an interpretation of present and emergent needs; there must be a type of realization" (Greene 1978, as cited in Frank, 2011, p. 68). It's a freedom *towards*, not a freedom *from*. Thus, critical action is undertaken within the social dimension of freedom, where critically oriented individuals are impelled (not compelled) towards justice.

They reject the neutrality of knowledge (Apple, 2019). According to Giroux (2011), "critical thinking cannot be viewed simply as a form of progressive reasoning; it must be seen as a fundamental political act" (p. 40). Thus, critical thinking with a *critical lens* reorients the political act towards a praxis of emancipation, revealing the interplay between critical thinking, historical consciousness, and emancipatory behavior (Giroux, 2011). A critical lens highlights the struggle over "assigned meanings, modes of expression, and directions of desire [in culture]" (Giroux, 2011, p. 4) and allows students to engage with the politics of education, the primary goal of which is the critical examination of systems and structures of domination in order to recognize undemocratic practices and institutions that uphold the status quo and support inequalities. This critical perspective also helps us to identify relationships of power, privilege, ideology, and culture, socio-historically located (Giroux, 2011).

At a foundational level, Freire's body of work with critical pedagogy resonates with EE, highlighted by a shared stated aim that "the purpose of education should be to develop a more socially just world" (Breunig, 2008a, p. 470). Drawing on works from Freire, Giroux, Apple, Kincheloe, and Breunig, I hope to demonstrate how applying a critical lens on experiential praxis may shift experiential pedagogies towards social change and justice through a critical (re)orientation.

Key Characteristics of a Critical Orientation

In this section, I attend to key principles and their corresponding expressions of a critical orientation. This section provides points to guide a later discussion of critically reconstructing experiential pedagogy. As noted above, I define critical as an explicit awareness of the dynamics of power and social justice; a critical orientation focuses on using experience and education as a means for emancipation and creating more just societies. Foremost, a critical orientation is

grounded on a social vision of justice and equity that maximizes human potential and minimizes harm. It recognizes the role of culture in shaping human identity; embraces intersectionality; and actively works to subvert insidious forces that marginalize people (hooks, 1994; hooks, 2010; Kincheloe, 2004). Rejecting the dominant Western epistemological position of positivism, a critical orientation questions information presented as objective truth, narrow singular perspectives in any field, and omissions of alternative, competing knowledge; it eschews a fixed and universal truth, limiting ways of knowing, and uniformity.

McLaren (2009) argues that schooling can be a site of both domination and liberation, "not simply as an arena of indoctrination or socialization or site of instruction, but also as a cultural terrain that promotes student empowerment and self-transformation" (p. 62). Educators are always either agents of change or perpetuators of the status quo; critical teachers choose change, engaging students in "critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization" (Freire, 1970, p. 75). In order to live the values a critical orientation demands, teachers implement practices that students need to be respected, empowered, and inspired and that help marginalized students succeed. Teachers address the "affective, emotional, and lived dimensions of everyday life in a way that connects students to people in groups and as individuals" (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 11). They understand, and build students' understanding of, ideological, hegemonic, disciplinary, and regulatory dimensions of power, within education and in society. The critically oriented teacher works to counter the negative effects of traditional education's blame of academic, cultural, and economic "failure" residing with the students, instead emphasizing the knowledge students' already possess as evidence of capacity and help students build on this foundation (Giroux, 2011).

An end for developing a critical lens is cultivating the intellect towards social change through problem posing, dialogue, and critical reflection. Since all knowledge is contextual—it does not transcend culture and history, no knowledge is beyond examination. A critical lens draws "attention to questions regarding who has control over the conditions for the production of knowledge, values, and classroom practices" (Giroux, 2011, p. 5), and no knowledge or perspective is exempt from critique. Problem posing encourages students to be researchers, to view the world with a healthy and creative skepticism needed to explore the invisible forces that shape our world and our perceptions (Freire, 1970; Bermudez, 2015). Social change and intellectual cultivation should be understood within a synergistic relationship; "Creating a just, progressive, creative, and democratic society demands both dimensions of this pedagogical process" (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 21). Instead of rejecting their authority, the critical teacher relinquishes the role of omniscient holder of truth, facilitating students as researcher and knowledge producer through inquiry and problem posing. In this role, students gain freedom in their autonomy to create their own knowledge and direct their lives. Critical teachers are learners and researchers who have a wealth of knowledge to contribute to educational research. They reflect on their knowledge and the multitude of contexts that shape their experiences. A critical lens provides a tool for decoding the world and personal experiences by illuminating underlying, often insidious, relations of power that shape our framework for understanding our experiences (Freire, 1970). A critical praxis is inherently dialogical as "dialogue is also critical to self-reflection and collective action" (Bettez & Hytten, 2013, p. 50). Critical teachers also engage in continuous dialogue with students to better understand them and their problems in order to help students confront and solve problems within a larger social, cultural, and political context, uncovering generative themes (Freire, 1970; Kincheloe, 2004).

Historical Foundations of Critical Social Pedagogies

To better understand critical social pedagogies of today, I attend to historical foundations, exploring how scholar-practitioners' ideas have shaped current theory and practice. Although a well-established theoretical tradition, critical theory is difficult to succinctly describe because, as Kincheloe (2004) notes, "(a) there are many critical theories, not just one; (b) the critical tradition is always changing and evolving; and (c) critical theory attempts to avoid too much specificity" (p. 48), which allows for dissent within its discourse. Critical theory generally refers to a theoretical tradition established by the Frankfurt School. Emerging from Western Marxism, Frankfurt School theorists maintained a Marxist perspective yet rejected aspects of Marxism they saw as no longer relevant (Agger, 2013). Importantly, Frankfurt School theorists moved the notion of critical thinking from a meta-cognitive, self-corrective process to one that critiques knowledge construction and the relations of power that structure practice (Bermudez, 2015). The theoretical reconstruction of the critical theorists included an analysis of the dialectic of Enlightenment, a critique of positivism, and an exploration of the culture industry and ideological and cultural manipulation (Agger, 2013).

While none of the theorists suggested a universal approach to cultural criticism, all believed that hegemonic domination, subjugation, and injustice shape the world and our lived experiences (Agger, 2013). Broadly, critical social theories are concerned with issues of power and the construction of social systems, and how both influence and are influenced by individuals' and communities' perceptions of themselves and the world. Critical theory continues to evolve, integrating new theoretical insights and adapting to changing social circumstances.

Outlining cultural hegemony as the notion of control by a ruling class or group through the domination and control of various cultural aspects, values, processes, and norms, Gramsci

believed it was only through education and cultural reform that a society could undergo a successful revolution (Salerno, 2004). "Much of Gramsci's descriptions of ideology then resonate with critical pedagogy by providing analytical tools for educators, students, and social activists to interrogate and challenge those dominant modes" (Rodriguez & Smith, 2013, p. 71). Gramsci's influence on Freire is evident in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, particularly in Freire's (1970) discussion of the revolutionary educator as an agent of change in overcoming the banking model of education, which serves to reproduce the dominant ideology, who resist hegemony partly through a historical consciousness (Kincheloe, 2004).

Informed by a bricolage of critical social theories, critical social pedagogies have evolved over time by embracing new critical discourses as they emerge (Kincheloe, 2004). Although critical theories are all concerned with the oppressive aspects of power, a critical pedagogy prioritizes the productive aspects of power to build critical consciousness through education, including critical reflection and action, towards a critical and just democracy.

There are many notable scholars that have contributed to the theory and practice of critical pedagogical traditions, including many non-Western Europeans. A precursor to the Frankfurt School theorists and Freire, W.E.B. DuBois (1903) introduced the concept of "double consciousness," contending oppressed people need to develop an understanding of their oppressors for their survival and to understand the mechanisms of their oppression, enabling marginalized people to affect and reform society (Apple, 2013, p. 76; Kincheloe, 2004; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009). Vygotsky asserts that cultural exposure is profoundly important to cognitive development and the tools available to us greatly impact our learning (Seaman & Gingo, 2011). Since the availability of tools—including sign systems like language, writing, and numbers—and individuals who model their use is dependent on our social context, cognition is

socially mediated; yet, due to our capacity to change context through the use of tools, we are not indelibly constrained by social and historical conditions.

In the seminal *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) conceptualizes the notion of the oppressor and the oppressed and identifies oppression as dehumanization of people and society. In noting the relationship between domination, oppressor, and oppressed, Freire argues that the oppressor, although benefitting from the system, is also a pawn in the system of domination. Further, as the oppressed achieve better situations, they too risk becoming oppressors. Thus, Freire saw oppression as cyclical. In order to break this cycle and create universal humanization, Freire (1970) prescribes a particular type of education, one that includes problem-posing—as mentioned above—in which teacher and student become critical co-investigators, equals in a dialogical process of exploration, united in their common humanity. This critical process both recognizes harmful power relationships and empowers both oppressors and oppressed to become change agents. Freire (1998) views education as a form of intervention in the world, insisting that education is never neutral, that it cannot be "indifferent in regard to the reproduction of the dominant ideology or the interrogation of it" (p. 91). The notion of neutrality simply supports the dominant, existing power structure. He believed that through education, we might help people develop agency and autonomy, and the freedom and responsibility that come with them.

Foundations of a Critical Experiential Pedagogy

Over the last 30 years, there has been increased interest in the relationship between pragmatism and critical theory within each tradition (Kadlec-Hassing, 2004). EE is rooted in the pragmatic tradition and a critical perspective is undergirded by the critical tradition; thus, a synthesis of theories would likely be of interest to scholars in both fields. Dewey's conception of critical thinking is meta-cognitive, a set of cognitive skills including analysis, inference,

evaluation, and interpretation (Bermudez, 2015), which transcends domain-specific knowledge; it is not a critical praxis revealing power structures. While Dewey acknowledges that knowledge construction is contextual and should be guided to democratic ends, he does not discuss how power relationships result in oppression. Kadlec's (2007) intentions in outlining a critical pragmatism were not to merge pragmatism with critical theory, rather to demonstrate that Dewey's pragmatism is not incongruent with critical theory, and indeed has critical aspects. In other words, Dewey's critical thinking can be critically reoriented. Taking a similar approach as Kadlec (2007), I demonstrate that EE is not incongruent with a critical orientation; I explore a theory of critical experiential pedagogy (CEP), building on the foundation of EE and incorporating a critical lens. Likewise, I establish a framework for a CEP through a systematic inquiry of EP through a critical lens, demonstrating how an EP, undergirded by a philosophy of EE, can be critically reframed to promote social justice outcomes.

Education for the Individual or the Social?

To preface the synthesis of a critical experiential pedagogy, I review the intended benefactor of education. Although contextualized by socio-political-economic systems, EE generally focuses on the learner as an individual (Itin, 1999). An important outcome of a critical orientation is it incites students to actions that improve communities' lives, in addition to their own; any pedagogy that is critical connects learning to social change (Giroux, 2011). The question is, then: who is education meant to serve: the individual or society; individuals within a community or the community-at-large[20]? Many educational philosophers, from an array of traditions, believe education is meant to serve society and schools must appreciate their

[20] According to Giroux (2011), education currently privileges neo-liberal values that place the market over individuals *and* the community.

responsibilities to society, such as Plato (1992), Dewey (1938), and Durkheim (see Smith, 2011b). Durkheim, for example, believed the processes of education and socialization were essentially the same (Smith, 2011b). Others distinguish between socialization and education in that the former prepares students for the world-as-it-is and the latter prepares them for "critical reflection and a motivation to change society" (Smith, 2011b, p. 153), both being directed towards the social.

There is an interesting and ongoing discussion regarding the tension between education for how society is and how society sh/could be[21]. Durkheim is adamant that it is not the role of education to change societal norms, that "schools should follow society, not lead it" (Smith, 2011b, p. 152), directly contrasting with Freire (1970), who believes education should lead to social action to combat oppressive systems and structures in society. Dewey (1938) argues education should teach the values of democracy to prepare students for democratic participation. He also cautions that while societal values should shape our schools, the desired norms and moral code in a democratic society may not be well-defined due, in part, to differing views. The question of whether we can prepare students for a democratic society if we educate for what-is and if "what is" is *not* democratic arises. Dewey (1985) concludes, "The conception of education as a social process and function has no definite meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind" (p. 103). If we prepare students for what-is, they may not awaken within them the desire to improve society. And if they are motivated to do so, they have not been educated on how to bring about change. If we educate for what-could-be, students may not be prepared to

[21] An in depth discussion of this tension is beyond the scope of this project; however, the tension between educating for what-is versus what-could-be is relevant to frame subsequent sections of this chapter.

navigate society well enough to work within the system to create change. Perhaps the middle ground suggests education should prepare students to be effective members of society while cultivating individuality, creativity, and critical thinking, and at the same time developing leaders who challenge injustice and re-form society. Can we socialize for what-is and educate for needed change simultaneously? And, where do experiential educators stand on this issue?

There are many reasons to conceive of education in terms of the collective and not the individual, not least of which is freedom. For Maxine Greene, the concept of freedom is best framed within the domain of community. "Freedom of mind and freedom of action [are] functions of membership and participation in some valued community. It is important to hold in mind that the *person*—that center of choice—develops in [their] fullness to a degree [they are] a member of a live community" (italics in original, Greene, as cited in Frank, 2011, p. 67). Further, the quest for freedom is a social and dialectic undertaking and can only be embodied in a sustained transaction (Frank, 2011). Seaman adds, "individual freedoms are realized throughout associations with one another" (in Smith & Knapp, 2011, p. 7). Freedom involves praxis—acting in concert to (re)construct reality, "a transformation of that situation to the end of overcoming oppressiveness and domination. There must be collective self-reflection; there must be an interpretation of present and emergent needs; there must be a type of live community" (Greene, as cited in Frank, 2011, p. 67). With others, barriers to freedom can be identified and transcended, coming together to change the world. This freedom could never be brought to fruition in education-for-the-individual; freedom can only be achieved through education-for-the-social as we are always already members of society.

An important consideration, then, when reimagining an experiential pedagogy through a critical lens is that EE becomes framed by social outcomes instead of individual ones. This is

particularly true for the romantic strand of EE as it prioritizes the individual and their learning. In Chapter 4, I address how an individual orientation to EE can be reoriented to become more critical through adopting a more social[22] lens.

Comparing Experiential Education and Critical Pedagogies

As I am interested in a reorientation of EE and experiential pedagogy through a critical lens, I draw from critical social pedagogies generally to understand what a critical orientation is. Much of the work within the critical strand of EE has utilized Critical Pedagogy (CP) specifically; thus, there is an element of familiarity for scholars and practitioners who are well-read across the field, regardless of the inclination towards a critical orientation. This may prove especially consequential for skeptics who need to warm to an idea through repetitive exposure.

EE and CP are educational traditions that are mutually supportive for several reasons (Gruenewald, 2003, p.3). Both pedagogies empower students to (co)create knowledge that is both contextualized and relevant to students' lives. Further, educational spaces are shaped by historical, socioeconomic, and cultural factors, and are politically contested spaces. Both fields contend, "the classroom, curricular, and school structures teachers enter are not neutral sites waiting to be shaped by educational professionals" (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 2). Thus, the role of the educator is crucial, and their commitment to corresponding principles extends well beyond methods or techniques employed. Both EE and CP acknowledge that their form of education is not generally the most "efficient" as they decenter transmission of information in favor of individual and socially contextualized meaning making and knowledge construction.

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[22] I make a distinction between *social* and *relational* later in Chapter 3 and discuss it further in Chapter 4. A relational lens will center the "we" that always contains the "I"; in other words, relational refers to a direct relationship. A social lens has much broader application, beyond the individual, and thus broader implications.

Although EE and CP share commonalities, two major tensions exist. Both stem from the premise that EE is based in the psychological and CP squarely in the sociological (Smith & Knapp, 2011). First, EE and CP approach how we fundamentally operate in the world in different ways, and this impacts our reflections on the world. Situated in the pragmatic tradition, EE expresses a commitment to the social and political—that is, the collective life—yet often centers the individual, especially within the romantic strand (and within the pragmatic strand to a lesser degree). Within EE, individuals act independently within society—a society of individuals, a constellation of parts that make a whole—instead of as individuals coalesced as a society, a whole consisting of inextricably interconnected individuals. In contrast, CP focuses on deconstructing and dismantling oppressive systems and structures. This attention already regards everyone as individuals-within-society. CP always considers the learner within the context of their socio-political, historical, and economic situations. In EE, one might say "We are masters of our own fate"; in CP, we would say "We are masters of our collective fate." The subtle—yet foundational—distinction between a society of individuals versus individuals-within-society deepens our understanding of differences between EE and critical social pedagogies.

Intimately related to the first, another major tension is the most basic goal of each pedagogy, which shapes how our actions are directed. The most fundamental outcome in EE is for individuals to better understand how they exist in the world, to understand themselves *as an individual* within the larger context of the world-as-it-is. CP, on the other hand, focuses on society connecting us as individuals, how we operate within society, and how society operates *through* us. While both pedagogies are action oriented, the object of the actions' focus diverges in EE and CP. Further, both pedagogies contextualize learning, yet what the contextualization services is a fundamental distinction. Introspection and insights created in EE, through critical

thinking, empowers individuals to direct their lives in meaningful ways. Action is focused on changes within the individual, how they move through the world-as-it-is. Without a *critical lens*, however, individuals act in their own best interest. CP expressly directs change towards a more just society, one committed to minimizing harm to all members of society; reflection and subsequent action are directed towards changes within society, even while those changes occur on an individual level, always within the context of the world-as-it-could-be.

The Necessity of a Theory of Critical Experiential Pedagogy

My project does not assert that EE is the *only* way to create a more just society through education; I do not even argue that EE is the *best* way. I hope to demonstrate two points. First, EE can be critically (re)oriented, regardless of which strand you practice. Second, when critically (re)oriented, CEP becomes a powerful tool for developing critically conscious learners, which I believe is necessary for critical social transformation.

EE proclaims a commitment to creating a more just society (Breunig, 2019), but it is not inherently critical. Many expressions of EE place more emphasis on the personal lens and the quest for discovery of the authentic self. While not necessarily at odds with justice, an individualistic focus likely privileges the self above society, often processing experience without critical dialogue nor for the purpose of social action. According to Eaton, "Theories become the strategy for change," ways to reimagine the world as we know it, ways to understand the same world, to analyze how it was constructed, how we are constructed, and how we construct it (as cited in Villaverde, 2007, p. 5). Thus, a theory that intentionally centers social justice while adhering to the principles of EE is imperative to reframe experiential pedagogy and provide experiential educators guidance to align individualistic outcomes with socially just ones.

Literature in EE demonstrates that the field is paying more attention to critical orientations of experiential pedagogy; however, there are still calls to reframe EE more critically to more closely align affirmed principles of social justice, particularly in the romantic and pragmatic strands. In general, experiential pedagogues have the best of intentions to create deep learning opportunities towards transformative outcomes; yet, "[w]e need to examine critically the consequences of our good intentions, practice, and policies to ensure that they do more good than harm to ourselves, others, and the surrounding environment" (North, as cited in Bettez & Hytten, 2013, p. 49). That is, experiential educators must critically reflect on the intentions of our practices versus the impact of outcomes on society. If we are not being critically self-reflective of our beliefs and practices, now is the time to start. Now is the time for a CEP.

There is immense potential in an EP to develop the capacity of an individual or group to be socially responsible (Breunig, 2019), yet EP lacks the explicit commitment made by CP to orient learners to serve community and participate in democratic processes. Critical pedagogies seek to develop agency within learners towards action in the world in effort of just social change, directed by a critical consciousness. A curriculum delivered using CEP can "deepen empathetic connections and expand the possibilities for learning outward" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 8), moving from developing capacity towards a re-orientation. By infusing criticality into EE through a CEP, we move from a rational to an embodied, holistic thinking/feeling to stay connected to the work of social change (Bettez & Hytten, 2013).

The rise of technical "education"—as opposed to training—and learnification (see Biesta, 2013), commodification of degrees, and many other shifts in the educational landscape have created disruptions, and generated some dissonance, in our educational systems. There is great potential in the disruptions to become resilient and develop grit, while at the same time

becoming more adaptive and experiencing transformation; moreover, dissonance can be a valuable springboard for critical reflection (Camus et al., 2022). While critical reflection and understanding does not itself liberate the oppressed, it is a step in the right direction (Freire, 2004). A CEP harnesses the power of developing resiliency, while reorienting it towards social transformation. Thus, these challenges in the larger educational systems provide an opportunity for a CEP to create real change, if only small and incremental.

However, a CEP is not a panacea. It is one potential approach to teaching and learning, to an educational praxis. While I believe there is inherent and broad utility in a CEP, it is neither the only nor always perhaps the best educational approach in specific contexts and situations. In attempting to define a CEP, I will not be suggesting a limiting theory to hang our hats on, rather to provide some clarity and direction. Any formal definition of a CEP risks dogmatism. Moreover, consensus on a definition is not a prerequisite to improving praxis and implementing a more critical EE.

How a Critical Experiential Pedagogy Relieves the Tensions Between Experiential Education and Critical Pedagogies

If EE strives to fulfill its commitment to social justice, a CEP is needed to reframe experiential pedagogy. Because EE is rooted in the psychological, intentionality is required to add a social lens. CEP takes the holistic approach from EE and always includes the social dimension, acknowledging that both the individual and the collective be considered when attempting to make sense of our experiences (Smith & Knapp, 2011). Durkheim believed that "it is only within the collectivity of the group that individuality can develop appropriately. Humans are social beings, and cannot be whole without being connected to the group" (Smith, 2011b, p. 153). As a CEP is sociological, it reorients an EP towards a social focus. Thus, a CEP brings EE

into alignment with Durkheim's assertion that the individual must always learn and grow within the context of the social in order to fully become, resolving the psychological versus sociological tension.

Both EE and CP call for action from learners as part of the process and as a significant outcome. According to Maxine Greene, education becomes transformative when students venture outside of their own vantage point and "construct a more holistic image of one's reality" (Frank, 2011, p. 70), that is, apply a critical lens to their reflection. CEP demands that the (re)construction consider issues of power, privilege and oppression in order to build a more just world view. Moreover, the new, reconstructed reality must inform new action that in turn leads to more just outcomes. By cultivating a critical consciousness through education, a CEP encourages a greater focus on society in order to bring about alignment with the learner's authentic self towards a just society, promoting personal growth while also spurring them to action through critical action (Brooks, Braun, & Prince, 2022). Personal choice and freedom must be more connected and aligned with just societal outcomes as a shared responsibility. As such, though CEP may not directly produce just outcomes as action directed by CP might, it becomes a spark, a catalyst for a more just future.

How Critical Pedagogies Fill Gaps in Experiential Education

Kincheloe (2004) asserts, "Love is the basis of an education that seeks justice, equality, and genius" (p. 3). Missing from EE literature is mention of teaching with heart, with love, from a place of love, etc. In a search of keywords of articles in the JEE[23], there were no results for "love" or "hope," and only one for "care/ethics of care." This demonstrates that such concepts

[23] I performed this search December 2022, which included all articles from 1979-2022.

are generally missing from the literature, and thus likely from the forefront of the experiential pedagogues' praxis. This is not to say that an experiential educator does not teach with love, hope, or care, yet these concepts are not *intentionally, explicitly* integrated into praxis, from design through implementation. Perhaps it is time to bring love back into our experiential pedagogy for the sake of caring and hope, as "a motivating force" (hooks, 1994). EE needs to ask if best practices currently "help create a democratic consciousness and modes of making meaning that detect indoctrination and social regulation" (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 4). So, a CEP will interrogate the inherent "goodness" of any educational endeavor, examining assumptions of just and equitable curriculum, design and implementation of teaching, learning outcomes, and all other aspects of praxis.

A key assumption in CP is that educators must possess a range of cultural understanding including "the ways power operates to construct identities and oppress particular groups; …cultural experiences of students; diverse teaching styles; the forces that shape the curriculum; [and] the often-conflicting purposes of education" (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 3). Although experiential educators acknowledge learning is always contextualized, there lacks an explicit commitment to attend to cultural dimensions of learning as critical pedagogues do. "Mainstream education [often] teaches students and teachers to accept the oppressive workings of power… [CP] moves students, workers, and citizens to question the hidden political assumptions and… induces students to question these power plays that lead to human suffering" (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 34-35). While EE may *acknowledge* issues of power, a critical orientation requires *addressing* issues of power, and critical educators model complex behaviors to help students learn to navigate—and share—power.

The Philosophical Underpinnings of Critical Experiential Pedagogy

A main goal of my project is to outline a theoretical framework for a CEP that is philosophically sound, thorough, and useful for scholars and practitioners. In this section, I begin by demonstrating congruence between principles of critical pedagogy and the philosophy of EE, particularly to affirm that EE's underpinnings, while not inherently critical, are not incompatible with criticality. I then explore the philosophical underpinnings of a CEP, reorienting EE's philosophy with a critical lens. Building on the philosophical foundation, in the next chapter I outline five major guiding principles of a CEP that any educator who desires to employ a CEP must consider; I also in course discuss the intended outcomes of CEP, again to provide direction for educators to guide backwards curriculum design, so they can design with outcomes in mind.

CEP utilizes commitments of a critical orientation to reconstruct teaching and learning theory and practice so that it empowers all students, and does not just reproduce or reinforce the status quo. It makes issues of power explicit and exploits students' natural curiosity to explore and interrogate issues of power and privilege, both those immediately at hand and, perhaps more importantly, those they will encounter in the future. It also enhances students' ability to accept responsibility in their role in reproducing or dismantling toxic systems of power. CEP does this by equipping students with a critical lens to perceive and process future experiences and learning opportunities, effectively reorienting them towards a criticality necessary to call out and address imbalances of power. For example, in an outdoor experiential environmental education program designed for place-based science learning, group facilitators are trained to focus on developing critical consciousness, especially focused on critical reflection and critical action[24] (Brooks,

[24] According to Brooks, Braun, and Prince (2022), group facilitators are trained to consider alternatives to make participation more inclusive, navigate microaggressions, facilitate

Braun, & Prince, 2022). CEP focuses on real-world problem solving, that is, the problem-solving process integrates the educational process into the world-at-large, as experienced by the student, and it is always connected to power dynamics inherent in the context. Gauthier et al. (2021), for example, demonstrate that participation in outdoor EE (OEE) programs requires students to negotiate Whiteness, heteronormativity, and settler colonialisms. CEP intentionally addresses these issues by recognizing diverse students' experiences and needs and disrupting Eurocentric narratives by including Indigenous histories. CEP highlights the responsibility that comes with knowledge and privileges the work necessary for students to "truly understand citizenship in their communities of interest" (Robert, 2016, p. 31).

In explicating a theory of CEP, my intent is to provide something concrete for educators to use to guide their praxis towards critical outcomes. It should be understood as a social theory, a map or guide to devise strategies and questions for exploring, interpreting, reinventing our world; however, CEP is not a prescription of how to see the world or how to behave in it. The quest for certainty in any form of education is a fool's errand, indeed. There are too many variables in any educational context to hope for certainty; perhaps we should replace our desire for certainty with a hopefulness—which I think a CEP is particularly adept in offering.

Demonstrating Congruence between the Philosophy of Experiential Education and a Critical Orientation

EE is grounded in pragmatism; Kadlec (2007) has demonstrated how pragmatism is compatible with critical values. Particularly, pragmatism is "deeply agentic in that it undergirds

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discussions of environmental injustices, and foster a critical sense of place—for example, understanding relationships between local places and Indigenous peoples. By intentionally applying a critical lens to strategic planning, curricular development, and training, the program becomes critically reoriented to address oppressive, rather than perpetuate it.

citizens' ability to actively and intelligently participate in creating the conditions in which they live… engagement must be deliberative, and it is in this deliberation that space opens for pragmatism to be critical" (Thomas, 2018, p. 27-28). EE is also rooted in progressivism, which borrows from the theoretical framework of constructivism (Quay, 2008), and is concerned with how learners construct knowledge from experience, reflection, and experimentation (Roberts, 2012). While the main objective of a constructivist theory may be exploring reality and constructing knowledge (Smith & Knapp, 2011), this does not preclude constructivism from being critical. Pedagogies based in critical theories aim for social transformation and emancipation (Giroux, 2011), and these outcomes are not at odds with knowledge exploration and creation. In the following sections, I demonstrate how the philosophical undergirding—ontology, epistemology, and ethics—of EE are *not incongruent* with a critical orientation—that is, EE can be critically oriented without loss of fidelity to EE's commitments.

Ontology

Based on Dewey's antifoundationalism, which is "based on a view that ours is an unfinished world in which flux and contingency make a necessary mockery of the notion of timeless Truths" (Kadlec, 2007, p. 10), EE embraces an antifoundational stance that assumes truth, like knowledge, is contingent and non-transcendental. Adopting an existential approach that emphasizes individuality, EE assumes the individual is always in transition—always becoming—and that reality is determined by your experiences (Crosby, 2008). From this perspective, learners are empowered to shape their own reality. Existentialism provides freedom but offers no direction. Consequently, in EE the learner is primarily responsible for understanding themselves.

Although critical theories adopt a realist ontology in that there is an external reality that exists and of which we are part (Braa & Callero, 2006), the ontological perspectives of EE and CP are not necessarily incompatible. Dewey's pragmatism asserts a commitment to critical reflection foregrounding the power and potential of the lived experience (Thomas, 2018), and "by reconstructing the power of lived experience to inform critical reflection, Dewey engages in a type of trenchant social criticism that is akin to the emancipatory interest-oriented analysis of traditional critical theorists" (Kadlec, 2007, p. 42). CP, imbued with hope, relies on an ontology of becoming, which, like EE, views learners as incomplete and always in a process of becoming (Shudak, 2014). Much of Freire's ontology was informed by existentialism, rejecting a mind/body dichotomy, and embracing the dialectical process (McKillican, 2020). Through an ontology of becoming, EE's ways of understanding the nature of being are congruent with a critical orientation.

Epistemology

By including dialogue in reflection, EE's epistemology is critically compatible. EE honors a myriad of ways of knowing and supposes that knowledge is neither fixed nor universal; knowledge is (co)created. EE relies heavily on reflection for constructing knowledge, yet reflection is not necessarily critically oriented. Regard dialogue as a legitimate way of knowing is a necessary but not sufficient condition to be critical (Bettez & Hytten, 2013). According to Shudak (2014), dialoguing with other people as a pedagogical act is one of reflection and intervention. For dialogue to take place, students first engage in thought by considering some object of knowledge and their experiences with it, then formulating ideas and questions, before sharing with others. This process frames dialogue as an act of reflection. Dialoguing with others "is also an act of intervention because any engagement with others is, by default, an intervening

into the subjectivity of others… Such acts allow students to participate in the historical processes that shape people's lives." (Shudak, 2014, p. 996). Thus, in the act of dialoguing with others, the essential component of reflection becomes compatible with a critical orientation.

Ethics

The axiology of any educational practice is the set of values that give praxis direction (Biesta, 2015). An experiential praxis, founded on EE's principles, requires developing learners' capacity for critical thinking and moral judgment. EE's central ethical claim that the value of an education is practical and future oriented is undergirded by the assumption that knowledge has moral consequences, which often calls for social action (Roberts, 2008). For example, in discussing white privilege in EE, Rose and Paisley (2012) assert, "[w]hite experiential educators must make efforts to disavow the notion of racial neutrality" (p. 149). Being aware of their racial privilege, they act in ways to subvert systemic oppression, making space for marginalized voices, practicing a pedagogy that "comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comforted" (Rose & Paisley, 2012, p. 148). Thus, when EP is oriented towards social action, and moral judgments are made under consideration of community over the self, the ethics of EE are critically congruent.

Philosophical Underpinnings

While we need to engage with questions of content, relationships, and purpose, the question of purpose is most fundamental; and without understanding education's purpose and values, we risk educational practice becoming merely technological instead of teleological (Biesta, 2015, p 18). When our educational endeavors are directed by purpose, we are better equipped to make decisions about content and appropriate relationships. In discerning education's purpose, we can better understand its ethics.

Our ethics are intimately connected to our ontological and epistemological views. "As one Stoic is said to have put it: 'physical speculation is to be adopted for no other purpose than for the differentiation of good and bad things'" (Linjamaa, 2019, p. 47). What is considered good—for Plato (1992), true virtue—will ultimately impact how we connect truth to knowledge and being. In what follows, I explore the metaphysics and ontology, epistemology, and ethics of a CEP, working from a foundation of EE. As I consider the philosophical undergirding of a CEP, it is important to frame it as a mode of thinking and being in the classroom instead of as a circumscribing theory of education.

Metaphysics and Ontology of a Critical Experiential Pedagogy

Any metaphysical account in EE must be seen as one possibility, not a necessary or exacting way of conceiving the world (Crosby, 2008). Our understanding of the nature of being and experience leads us towards certain ethical and pedagogical outcomes in lieu of others. For example, your metaphysical belief of an ultimate guiding purpose impacts your reality, your truth, and consequently, your actions. As such, Christians believe we are headed to the Kingdom of God and Marxists towards a classless society (Crosby, 2008). My purpose in articulating the metaphysics of a CEP is to explore and clarify one set of ways of relating to the world, one that is critically (re)oriented. CEP's metaphysical orientation creates an ethical imperative, that is, an ontology of hope (Anderson, 2006), an ontology that embodies the insistence of the possibility of remaking the world (Freire, 2004).

Metaphysical realism dictates that neutral, objective descriptions of reality exist, which inhibits interpretations (Cruickshank, 2020). Accordingly, EE rejects realism and its universals; EE intends that learners attempt to see the world through many vantage points in order to surpass what-is to what-could-be and adopts a metaphysics of contingency. Based on the notion of

becoming, we recognize that we exist in a world in flux, and therefore must embrace an antifoundationalism that permeates EE's philosophy. However, Cruickshank (2020) differentiates between a negative and a positive contingency in how contingency is recognized. A negative contingency allows for monologic authority claims to elicit reactions towards changing demands; a positive contingency eschews monologic authority claims towards a sense of dialogic solidarity and radical change. In becoming critical, a CEP must always employ a positive contingency. Through reflective and dialectic practice, learners can reimagine and (re)shape their reality.

Cruickshank (2020) contends that, according to Freire, educators can encourage radical change yet cannot metaphysically legislate, as Plato's philosopher king would. Freire maintains liberation will not come through the passive acceptance of another's authority, rather in the recognition of their own nature as one of becoming (Cruickshank, 2020). To illustrate, I may believe in a gender binary, a belief that cannot be proven "false," and I will not likely change my mind because someone explains how harmful this perspective is to gender queer—and gender normative—folks. Yet, I can harness my power of becoming and find liberation through the action-oriented process of critical reflection on my belief, both a cognitive and affective process, towards a more inclusive, less harmful understanding of gender. A liberated person seeks solidarity with others in order to develop a movement for radical change.

EE takes an existential approach to its ontology, presuming individuals are responsible for discerning their own notions of truth and the meaning of life and, ultimately, their authentic being (Smith & Knapp, 2011). Correlatively, students are encouraged to understand personal responsibility corresponding to their personal choices. Yet, if a CEP is going to adopt an education-for-community over -for-the-individual orientation, CEP's ontology must be

concerned with a communal existence. The notion of becoming then refers to a becoming as part of society, not as an individual who happens to live in society.

As previously noted, CP relies on an ontology of becoming, one imbued with hope, which views learners as incomplete and always in a process of becoming. For Freire (1997), "human beings could not *be* without the impulse of hope. Hope is an ontological requirement for human beings" (p. 44). So, CEP reorients EE's ontology through a hopefulness and unfinishedness provided by CP. Regarding his unfinishedness, Freire (1998) proclaims,

> I like being human because I know that my passing through the world is not predetermined, preestablished. That my destiny is not a given but something that needs to be constructed and for which I must assume responsibility… [In] my unfinishedness I know that I am conditioned. Yet conscious of such conditioning, I know that I can go beyond it, which is the essential difference between conditioned and determined existence. (p. 54)

Infusing hope, in some manner, directs transformation towards something positive, instead of neutral—growth towards betterment instead of mere change. For instance, it is hope that drives Marxist philosopher Bloch to describe Utopia as "normative totality as the end of all alienation and reification" (Jay, as cited in Anderson, 2006, p. 696). Hope allows us to transcend reality in exploration of a possible world, a better world, one that is always undecided (Anderson, 2006). Through an ontology of becoming, of unfinishedness, CEP both encourages learners to accept a social responsibility towards creating a just shared existence, through critical reflection and dialectic practice, and transcend their oppression.

Epistemology of a Critical Experiential Pedagogy

CEP epistemology supposes that knowledge is co-constructed through the educational process, that it is created within, and as a consequence of, relationships found within the learning process (Burton, 2010). Like EE, a CEP blurs the distinction between affective and cognitive knowing as it does with experience, which is also affective and cognitive (Crosby, 2008). Drawing from constructivism, CEP reorients learning from a relational to a social activity. In differentiating between relational and social, I imagine a web of relationships across a community. Any one individual is not directly connected to all nodes in the web, yet has indirect associations with all. In relational learning, the focus is on the relationship with direct connections, those to whom we are closest. Understanding learning as a social activity reframes learning to include all those around us, not just those directly impacted by our experiences and subsequent growth. Further, the knowledge created within a process of CEP is understood to be contextual, temporal, provisional, and unfinished, in process.

For any pedagogy to be critical, it necessarily assumes an epistemological position that understands dialogue as central to the construction of knowledge. "Dialogue is a way of knowing with and *through* others…, the process of knowing and learning that allows students to use experiences in and with the world… to learn more about self, others, the world, and the object [of study]" (Shudak, 2014, p. 996). Dialogue is an "existential necessity," well aligned with an ontology of becoming; dialogue humanizes people (Shudak, 2014). Through the process of dialogue, learners become aware of their unfinishedness as beings who are becoming; it is in this realization we can overcome the dehumanizing conditions of society-as-it-is.

CEP rejects both positivism and its mandate that all knowledge, and therefore ontologically that truth and reality, is scientific, empirically verifiable, measurable, uniform,

fixed, certain, objective, and universal. While objects of knowledge that are empirically verifiable exist—e.g., the circumference of Earth—and scientific inquiry is answerable to an independent world, there are many ways of knowing and other modes of knowledge creation aside from scientific inquiry, such as indigenous wisdom and artistic knowing. The goal of knowledge creation is not the "correct" answer, as that might change (Crosby, 2008). Adjacent, "'Truth' is not some abstract, objective reality, but rather 'that which works' or 'that which explains'" (Crosby, 2008, p. 168); truth is what is verifiable. The end goal of inquiry, for critical pragmatists employing a CEP, is a coherent system of beliefs (Legg & Hookway, 2021).

CEP requires that teachers teach students in culturally relevant ways, connecting with knowledge they already possess. It insists on rejecting the conflation of cultural differences with cognitive deficiencies. It resists the positivistic rationality and reductionistic quest for order and certainty, embracing the expected and unexpected complexities of the lived experiences of students; CEP celebrates and even leverages the coexistence of the students' embodied and diverse meanings, interpretations, and ways of knowing. In doing so, students are empowered to create knowledge and construct meaning, not just "discover" a truth. By exploring the world through a critical lens, students will consider alternate meanings and interpretations, expanding the scope of what is possible, breaking down limiting positivistic barriers that dictate what should be, removing blinders to see what could be.

Ethics of a Critical Experiential Pedagogy

In the tradition of existentialism, EE centers freedom as the intrinsically essential value and the cornerstone on which all other values are founded. Existentialism's governing norm of authenticity, which is the notion that I exist first as an individual, as *my*self and not *a* self, is necessary to perceive human existence and is even deemed as a categorical moral imperative

(Crowell, 2020). It claims that individuals do not have a universal, inherent set of values; rather values are shaped by experiences and choices. In other words, the essence of what makes us human is preceded by our existence, and our existence is not predicated on nature or culture; we have no predetermined frameworks or systems (Crowell, 2020). Then, while authenticity is not a prerequisite of acting morally, it is precisely the choice of authenticity that gives us freedom.

This individualistic, non-normative approach in EE is not appropriate for a CEP. CEP approaches ethics from a normative perspective, foremost, seeking emancipation from oppression, moving towards a socially just society. For Freire (1998), there is a universal human ethic, "which calls us out of and beyond ourselves" (p. 25). In understanding our being, Freire (1998) asserts we are "born in the womb of history," of "our being as something constructed socially and historically and not there simply a priori" (p. 25). Our being in the world is always as a relational presence in the world, and thus we "cannot hope to escape [our] ethical responsibility for [our actions] in the world" (Freire, 1998, p. 26). Thus, CEP reorients ethics from individual authenticity to a social responsibility. Further, as a pedagogy, praxis is always connected to the moral formation of the learners.

Ethics in CEP is a lived experience, reflected in our interactions with others and our institutions, especially educational and political arrangements (Monchinski, 2010). CEP also fosters an ethic of care, hope, and love. Kincheloe (2004) notes that, "Love is the basis of an education that seeks justice, equality, and genius" (p. 3). A pedagogy of radical love embraces "the empathetic, active, and passionate impulse to transform social relationships in ways that seek justice and freedom" (Kennedy & Grinter, 2013, p. 44). A pedagogy of hope insists that hope is an ontological necessity, which is anchored in our praxis (Freire, 2004). An ethic of hope asks us to imagine the process of transformation as "one in which a better future takes shape out

of our students' critical refusal to abide the limitations of the present" (Gannon, 2020, p. 5). CEP and an ethic of care is "linked through the concepts of teacher-student mutuality and positionality; democratic authority and dialogue; caring protections and the relationship of the individual to her autonomy to the wider social whole" (Monchinski, 2010, p. 85). Participation in and learning through a CEP will result in someone who is more critically oriented but also someone called to action.

A value particularly essential to a CEP is trust. Where dialogue is a necessary component of CEP's epistemology, trust is the ethics involved that allows for critical dialogue. Free from manipulation and relations of hierarchy and domination, an ethics of trust allows teachers and learners to engage freely in the dialogical process (Shudak, 2014). Freire posits that dialogue "requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and recreate, faith in their vocation to be more fully human" (as cited in Shudak, 2014, p. 997). While not naive, faith in the goodness of others, before even meeting them, is necessary for true, critical, and conscientious dialogue.

Conclusion

While EE has potential to support powerful learning opportunities for students and educators, it is not inherently critical and does not necessarily support social justice-oriented outcomes. I have demonstrated a critical compatibility with EE and outlined the philosophical underpinnings of a CEP. In the final chapter, I propose a theoretical framework for CEP and explore examples of theory in practice.

CHAPTER IV: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF A CRITICAL EXPERIENTIAL PEDAGOGY: CRITICAL EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION IN ACTION

In the previous chapter, I outlined philosophical commitments of a critical EE. In what follows, I expound on EE's theoretical framework to highlight the guiding principles of a theoretical framework for a *critical* EE. Next, I share four examples of enactments[25] of CEP within CEE, connecting theory to practice. Within each example, I highlight instances of the application of CEE guiding principles. After reviewing demonstrations of EE that are already critically oriented, I consider the process through which a program can become more critically reoriented. I conclude the chapter with discussions of CEE's implications, limitations, and areas for further research. Educators in EE should evaluate if their praxis allows them to fulfill EE's commitment to exploring issues of values, inclusion, and community. CEP offers a new perspective for not-yet-critical educators, which helps keep our praxis relevant and current. CEP offers guidelines for praxis; however, it is not prescriptive and does not offer a universal approach; critical educators also accept more variability in learning outcomes. In addition to strengthening EE's theoretical roots and critically reorienting the theory and praxis of EE, my hope is that a well-delineated theory of CEP will prove useful towards broader adoption and implementation of a critical reorientation of EE theory and praxis.

Guiding Principles of a Theoretical Framework of Critical Experiential Education

The theoretical framework of a CEE builds on that of EE's framework. Aligned with the philosophical commitments described in the previous chapter, I elucidate five guiding principles

[25] Examples include critical service learning, critical outdoor adventure education, critical learning seminar, and critical curriculum mapping for study abroad.

that illuminate CEE's theoretical framework and provide guidance for implementing a CEP: critical lens; teacher guidance; dialogue; critical reflection; and critical communities. For experiential educators not currently practicing within the critical strand, I hope these principles will provide opportunities to consider how they can critically reorient their praxis.

Critical Lens

EE already always considers education political (Itin, 1999). As a critical pedagogy, CEP insists we examine how power influences interactions and decision-making, as is necessary when applying a critical lens as defined in the previous chapter. As a pedagogy of politics, a CEP "views experience through the lens of power, either as a tool for reproducing inequalities or as a means for emancipation" (Roberts, 2012, p. 69).

EE is already an empowering educational process designed to cultivate intellect and other ways of knowing (Breunig, 2008a). At its best, CEP redirects this energy towards the pursuit of social justice, or at least reorients it through a lens which considers issues of social justice. The critical lens considers non-Western, indigenous, and other marginalized perspectives to better appreciate the dynamics and complexity of issues from various viewpoints. A CEP acknowledges we live in a complex web of reality (Kincheloe, 2004). Empirical knowledge and scientific ways of knowledge are not inherently bad; rather they provide us with one perspective of reality. Yet, we must employ multiple methods of knowledge production and consider sometimes contradictory interpretations within a CEP to best make sense of a dynamic and complex world. An important principle is that a CEP encourages learners to develop a tolerance for, and even find comfort in, contradiction, ambiguity, complexity, and nuance.

Teacher Guidance

Teachers[26] play a vital role in the educational process, both in supporting the student and in supporting teaching and learning. Foremost, teachers have respect for their students and the knowledge they bring with them to the learning process (Freire, 1998, p. 3). Leaning into critical pedagogy, the critical experiential educator always respects the "autonomy, dignity, and identity of the student" (Freire, 1998, p. 63). Just as education is not neutral, neither is the educator (Freire, 1970). For Freire (1998), education is "a form of intervention in the world" (p. 91). In EE, the teacher is often seen as a facilitator of learning, sometimes falling into constructivist Socratic "teaching," in which the teacher facilitates the acquisition of commonsense wisdom and the clarification of values (see Aronowtiz, in Freire, 1998) or knowledge is seen as maieutic and learning as immanent (see Biesta, 2013). Critical experiential educators both acknowledge that students are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge from the teacher *and* reject a maieutics model that dictates the extraction of latent knowledge within the student. The educator is chiefly responsible for creating possibilities for knowledge construction and production (Freire, 1998). Although CEP draws on constructivist epistemology, it does not subscribe to a constructivist pedagogy[27]; it is in this commitment that a CEP augments the possibility of radical learning.

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[26] In Chapter 2, I noted the interchangeable use of educator, teacher, and facilitator—and student, learner, and participant. While each term has different connotations, regardless of the context of practice—or the term use—the experiential educator adheres to the principles outlined here.

[27] Biesta (2013) cites Virginia Richardson (2003), "constructivism is a theory of learning and not a theory of teaching" (p. 45). He asserts, "belief in a constructivist learning theory does not necessarily require that one adopt a constructivist pedagogy" (p. 45).

Both teacher and student bring knowledge into a dialogic relationship. Teachers are not keepers of knowledge, ready to transmit information to students; rather the critical experiential pedagogue is ready to "provide students with knowledge that students then react to, reject, reinterpret, analyze, and put into action" (Freire, as cited in Kincheloe, 2004, p. 21), which highlights the relational aspect of education. Their role is not to center themselves in the knowledge creation process—nor merely confirm innate or latent understanding, but to provide additional resources, anchor learning to objectives, and model the learning process, responding to their students with intentionality and embodying dialectic communication (Freire, 1970, p. 79). Thus, the teacher's role in the educational process is more than just the facilitation of learning as a maieutics model; they are acknowledged as having valuable experience to contribute to the learning process (Freire, 1998). The educator's contribution to the teacher-student relationship has the power to disrupt students' hegemonic ways of knowing. It does not discount the students' experiences and the knowledge they bring to the process; rather, it attempts to build upon it through disruption and reconstruction.

In CEP, the educator attempts to create an educational environment in which communication-as-participation is a dialogical, generative process that results in a shared understanding and common world. Communication-as-participation communalizes the process of learning and increases investment in one another; Dewey (1985) maintains it

> first employ[s] a *joint* activity, as a means of setting up an active connection… [and] similar ideas or meaning spring up because both persons are engaged as partners in an action where what each does depends upon and influences what the other does. (p. 19).

Moreover, the critical experiential educator accepts the risks associated with outcomes being neither predictable nor guaranteed, and is open to learning from each other and with each other,

approaching the other with an asset-based—as opposed to a deficit-based—mindset (Breunig, 2019). The co-construction of knowledge recognizes the self and the other as mutually constitutive. Knowledge becomes shared and intertwined with another in a way that binds people together. Co-creating knowledge doesn't remove lines of difference, rather co-constructs a path of connection.

CEE is committed to communication-as-participation, in which teachers and students are actively engaged in creating common understanding and a shared world (Dewey, 1985). However, we do not have to start from common ground to be able to engage in the educational process together—cooperation-through-communication; it is through the process of a joint experience that we produce a common understanding. In a CEP, common understanding is pushed even further in that the learning has a greater potential to transform ideas and values of all the participants, co-creating a new shared understanding that can be more justice oriented. It is in this transformation that the emancipatory power of CEP resides. When our common understanding recognizes injustice through oppressive systems and structures, we are better equipped for collective action in which we all have a stake and a shared outlook and understanding of our collective responsibility.

CEP requires perhaps a small but healthy amount of cynicism to question students at a deeper level, to help them recognize the insidious ways in which positivism and dominant ways of thinking, knowing, processing, behaving, etc. shape our understanding of the world and our place in it (Roberts, 2012). No knowledge is exempt from critique, and exposing epistemological assumptions deepens understanding of what knowledge means to us (and what it doesn't, what we exclude) to further contextualize how we operate in the world. According to Kincheloe (2004), without "understanding of their own cultural embedding, individuals are not capable of

understanding from where the prejudices and predispositions they bring to the act of meaning-making originate" (p. 38). This cultural epistemological awareness supports a critical reorientation in that uncovering a current, invisible lens makes realignment easier. It's easier to solve a known problem than an unknown, unseen problem.

Dialogue

In any social justice-oriented pedagogy, dialogue is a critical component of the process. Dialogue helps expose us to "a kaleidoscope of viewpoints, [which] encourages us to engage the world around us in ways we might not otherwise," which in turn can deepen our critical self-reflexivity (Bettez & Hytten, 2013, p. 50). Experiential pedagogy is committed to reflection towards analysis, synthesis, and action; yet, reflection can take many different forms, from group discussion to journaling (Bolick, Glazier, & Stutts, 2020) to experience mapping through visualization maps (Ebbini, 2022) to interpretive dance (Payne & Costas, 2021), and everything in between. In addition to encouraging multiple modes of reflection, including cognitive, affective, and corporeal, CEP ensures dialogue is integrated along with other forms as a central method of critical reflection.

Freire's conceptions of dialogue and praxis are fundamental to CEP. McLarnon (2013) notes, "The Freirean (1972) notion of dialogue, which can be defined as informal education built on mutual respect, can only be achieved if there is equality, cooperation and a collaborative understanding between the learner and educator" (p. 19). CEP extends this definition of productive dialogue to include equality, cooperation, and collaborative understanding between learners, as a community of learners. That is, dialogue is not confined to the teacher-student relationship, but between any combination of people within the group. Effective dialogue includes learning to listen carefully and with an open mind, setting aside assumptions and

judgment, and sharing ideas thoughtfully, honestly, and humbly (Bettez & Hytten, 2013). The ability to effectively dialogue across differences is one of the most important skills a critical experiential educator can help students develop.

Critical Reflection

An essential component of a CEP, as I have discussed elsewhere, is critical reflection. Reflection—or Dewey's (1997) secondary experiences—is an essential part of the learning process in EE. In CEP, the educator takes care to move from reflection to self-reflection, ultimately to becoming critically self-reflective. "When we are *critically self-reflective*, we consider the beliefs and positions we hold, why we see the world as we do, and remain open to alternative positions and possibilities" (italics in original, Bettez & Hytten, 2013, p. 49). To truly be critically self-reflective, we must first learn "to see our own cultural lens to understand why we interpret the world as we do, especially because we are not typically conscious of how these lenses operate, and thus we think the way we see the world is natural or common sense" (Bettez & Hytten, 2013, p. 57). For example, Gauthier et al. (2021) demonstrated that experiences in outdoor EE courses generally lack consideration of the values and beliefs of non-Eurocentric cultures and ignore the needs of those who require alternative options that are culturally sensitive. We need to learn to remove our glasses with their hegemonic films, make visible the insidious modes of power that filled our prescriptions, and try on others' glasses, to see the world through their lens.

The ultimate goal of engaging in critical reflection is developing critical consciousness, which also requires critical action. Critical consciousness "involves the development of new forms of understanding that connect us more directly to understanding, empathizing with, and acting" on suffering and injustice to create more just societies (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 12-13). This

requires us to engage in the struggle against inequality, which requires engaging with the realities of suffering caused by oppression. Perhaps practicing critical reflection will inspire critical action as part of a critical consciousness. Case in point, Rose and Paisley (2012) assert that critical experiential educators must withstand the traps of keeping programming "emotionally 'safe' and comfortable" (p. 149)—critical action to minimize reproducing structural inequities in CEE.

Thus, CEP is centered on Dewey's (1997) secondary experiences. While critical experiential pedagogues attend to the conceptualization of the primary experience (Dewey, 1997), careful attention must be paid to the creation of the secondary experience so that they are appropriate for their stage of growth (Roberts, 2016; Gibbons & Hopkins, 1980). The process of honest and thorough observation and thoughtful, vulnerable reflection is inherently present, guided as needed by the instructor based on students' capacities. Studying the impacts on pre-service teaching of working with English language learners (ELL) via critical service learning, Tinkler et al. (2019) highlights critical communication and observes that learning required "structured dialogue and reflection" (p. 66), noting both are needed to develop effective practice in working with ELLs. "If theory is truly to become the strategy for change, …the knowers must have multiple tools at their disposal and be willing to reconceptualize the use of these tools beyond their intended purpose." (Villaverde, 2007, p. 8). The process of secondary experiences, which include active critical reflection and meaning making, must include multiple ways for the learner to engage with their experience, including their thoughts and feelings. All education models result in forms of what Dewey (1938) calls "collateral learning" (p. 48), that is, the formation of lasting attitudes and preferences. CEP may not guarantee critically-based

outcomes—nothing can be guaranteed; however, the collateral learning of students should be towards a more socially just orientation.

Critical Communities

> Communities are invaluable to CEP. Communities
>
> provide an important climate and context for genuine learning and empowerment… [They can be used to] promote democracy, moral development, better learning, and citizenship. Communities offer connection, interdependence, and belonging. They are also what sustain us in our social change efforts. They provide us with support, momentum, energy, guidance, ideas, grounding, and strategies for action. Community members help us to be generous, reflective, responsible, and accountable. (Bettez & Hytten, 2013, p. 52)

Learners are individuals in the context of the community, not the community forming around the context of the individuals. In other words, while the community is shaped by the individual identities of its members, members take the community as part of their identity. As discussed in Chapter 2, EE is concerned with students' development as citizens who are able to serve the community and participate in the democratic process. CEP interrogates what it means to "serve the community," including asking how we serve, who we serve, what issues underlie the need for the service, and how do we address those issues systemically. CEP seeks to add the critical aspect to "service" so it becomes in service of just social transformation. This will be discussed in depth in a later section.

Critical communities become even more important in CEP than in EE. "Community allows for the needed exchange of competing thoughts, requires individuals to relinquish part of their individuality to support the whole, and provides an opportunity to accomplish goals that

could not be achieved alone" (Reskill & Brookfield, as referenced in Bettez & Hytten, 2013, p. 50-51). Mitchell (2008) concurs that authentic, mutual relationships that value lines of difference and dialogic engagement encourages learners to challenge the self-other binary and build trust and respect. Thus, community provides us with opportunities to engage with a variety of ideas and beliefs we would not encounter on our own, and as a community member, we engage in experiences—whether primary or secondary—from a group perspective. The group perspective is not necessarily in lieu of, but in addition to the individuals' perspective, which promotes experience as social. We see what we can accomplish as a group, working towards a synergy of process and outcomes. Moreover, as working towards transformative change can be confusing and emotionally draining (Bettez & Hytten, 2013), we may need communal support and encouragement more so than with a traditional experiential pedagogy.

Intended Outcomes

There are two fundamental and related outcomes intended in CEP: developing a questioning mindset and a critical consciousness. Both of these outcomes are related to a critical lens. CEP should instill a questioning mindset in students, one in which students continue the process of exploring, reflecting, inquiring, and acting long after any formal lesson is complete. Students become detectives of new insights, new ways of thinking, perceiving, interpreting the world around them, searching for interconnected ways to understand how power operates and shapes our experiences and knowledge (Kincheloe, 2004). Moreover, a questioning mindset impels engagement in habitual, even compulsive, inquiry. The act of questioning causes disruptions in our everyday experiences, thus this mindset becomes a motivating factor for continual change.

CEP should also develop a critical consciousness—a way of being, or a disposition, that includes a praxis of critical reflection and critical action on the world to transform it (Freire, 1970)—that teaches students to consume information critically and suspiciously, to engage with the other with both compassion and reservation—not a hesitation to connect, to fully engage with the other, but rather suspending judgment and considering their point of view through a critical lens—and to be particularly aporetic of information that claims to be neutral or objective truth. Critical consciousness becomes a habit in the Deweyan sense, a predisposition to act, a readying to engage when inquiry from the questioning mindset results in dissonance. Developing a critical consciousness is distinguished from a questioning mindset in that the latter motivates broad inquiry and insatiable curiosity and the former is focused on critically examining beliefs, interrogating assumptions, and considering issues of power, privilege, dominance, and oppression. Thus, a CEP should both cause a disruption and disarm students from their ability to ignore the power relations at work in the real world, in our everyday experiences, to pretend the disruption never occurred.

These outcomes may be in addition to ones prescribed by a set curriculum; yet critical experiential educators should design learning experiences that intentionally include these outcomes in order to ensure the learning process—reflection and action—are critically reoriented. Assessment of these outcomes in practice should be formative, continual, and qualitative, in addition to other curricular outcomes. Further, purpose and outcome are not the same thing. Critical experiential educators can operate within a traditional educational setting that likely serves an oppressive purpose, and in doing so, they subvert the oppression by seeking critical, empowering outcomes. It is also important to note that a justice-oriented purpose does

not ensure justice-oriented outcomes, and a CEP must attend expressly—yet not exclusively—to the outcomes.

Examples of Practice within Critical Experiential Education

In this section, I discuss four different examples of CEE in practice to illustrate how CEE might look in various contexts: critical service learning, critical outdoor adventure education, critical learning seminar, and critical curriculum mapping for study abroad. While I believe each example provides an excellent illustration of CEE in action, I am not suggesting they are necessarily exemplars, nor are they meant to be prescriptive, which would be counter to the principles of EE. I choose enactments I believe will have wide application in many different settings, within traditional and alternative educational environments, indoors and outdoors, long-term and short-term project applications, and for many different roles. I included the curriculum mapping example as I believe planning is crucial to the success of CEP, yet the curriculum mapping process is not often discussed within the literature.

Critical Service Learning

Service learning is well-documented as a powerful educational tool designed to cultivate civic responsibility in students (Shea et al., 2023). It is intended to be mutually beneficial for participants and the community they serve. However, when service learning programs are developed that focus mainly on the student experience, there is risk in perpetuating a consumer-driven mindset--the student consumes the experience of helping in the community--that serves to maintain the conditions that the service is meant to address (Shea et al., 2023). Further, within the pragmatic strand, interactive experiences are often imbued with notions of social harmony, not conflict (Roberts, 2012). Without a critical lens, participants in service learning often fail to recognize interrelated issues of identity, power, privilege, and culture embedded in service

(Mitchell, 2008). Critical service learning (CSL), through critical action and reflection, aims to "encourage students to see themselves as agents of social change, and use the experience of service to address and respond to injustice in communities," and is described as a revolutionary pedagogy due to its potential for social change (Mitchell, 2008, p. 51). Importantly, students learn to be change agents without reinforcing systems of oppression (Yomantas, 2021). According to Mitchell (2008), there are three elements that distinguish *critical* service learning from service learning: redistributing power, developing authentic relationships, and adopting a social change orientation.

Yomantas (2021) outlines a month-long critical service learning project for college undergraduates in rural Fiji. This project not only provides an excellent example of critical service learning, with information about planning and implementation, it also doubles as a case for critical study abroad. Students participated in many aspects of community life, including at local schools and a medical clinic, in cultural activities and ceremonies, and with construction projects and farm work. Yomantas met with local partners prior to the program to build a program schedule that met the needs of the participants and the needs and preferences of local communities, adapting plans as needed throughout, to yield mutual benefits (p. 33). For example, when completing a construction project at a local church, participants followed cultural protocols, procedures, and expectations, learning from community partners about their construction methods. Pre-service coursework included learning about cultural responsiveness and the indigenous Fijian peoples (p. 32). Outcomes for participants for this CSL project were plentiful and included: identifying insider/outsider boundaries (p. 40) and considering them in decision-making (p. 41); understanding service is more responsible and beneficial when done alongside community members (p. 41); sharing power and decision-making enhances mutual

understanding, as does intentional, mindful, ongoing dialogue (p. 41); and gaining "new skills to ask questions about their intentions, perceptions, and the 'why' behind their actions" (p. 41).

The intentional application of critical reflection throughout the service learning process is essential. There is clearly the element of critical action, as a primary activity in CSL is engaging in service directed towards just outcomes. Participants develop their political and social agency as they engage in service in which they see the impacts of their activism to combat social injustice (Yomantas, 2021). The role of the teacher is crucial, as with any expression of CEE, to guide critical reflection, because without critical reflection—which should be done before, throughout, and upon completion of service—students risk their service losing its critical component and missing the benefits of their actions, becoming mere activity or—worse—reinforcing oppressive relationships (Tinkler et al., 2019).

Critiques of service learning include that hosts—those "receiving" the service—are not often included in the planning process and do not benefit from programs as much as those participating in the service, creating an exploitative relationship (Mitchell, 2008). For instance, students serving a meal at a homeless shelter benefit from "serving" those in need; yet, those they served could have performed the task themselves, creating a situation in which students are exploiting the situation of the people who are homeless. Ringstad et al. (2012) reiterate the need for collaboration, democratic participation, and community transformation. CSL should always yield mutual benefits for hosts and participants. Partnerships are a key theme in CSL (Ringstad et al., 2012), building critical communities. In addition to working closely with hosting partners during the service, partners are included in planning. Decisions about projects and directions for their completion should be co-constructed by hosts and those serving, and benefits of CSL need to be analyzed across the partnership, not just for the participants (Yomantas, 2021).

Whether within or outside of participants' culture, students learn to navigate new environments, protocols, procedures, and expectations. In CSL, participants learn to "practice asking for permission, waiting to be invited, standing back, and learning from others in the process," rather than just preceding in the manner participants assume are best (Yomantas, 2021, p. 33). Learners work within partnerships outside of their "in" group, demonstrating the social—versus relational—component of CSL. Another benefit of CSL is that it often results in joyful experiences shared by hosts and participants, connections across two groups, possibly bridging cultures, and creating stronger community, as was demonstrated by Yomantas (2021). By creating relationships with hosts, the aspect of relational learning is strengthened; more personal connections on your social web generate more avenues for potential relational learning. However, I suggest that CSL can elevate relational learning to social learning through critical reflection. In developing relationships with those outside of our "in" group, people with whom we already have commonalities and connections, we build our capacity for empathy for those with whom we have no immediate relational connection. Through critical reflection of our relationship building process, we also build capacity to transfer our learning from those relational connections to a broader social context. Instead of thinking about serving a specific community, we expand our empathy to include all of society, and society becomes our impetus for critical praxis, not a specific service project.

Critical Outdoor Adventure Education

Roberts (2012) discusses the "strange lands" concept, venerated in the romantic strand, that emphasizes notions of "expedition," whether in nature-based settings or in another culture. Critical experiential educators can reframe expeditionary experiences such that learners engage critically and consider social justice outcomes. Outdoor adventure-based experiential education

(OAEE) is typified by expedition style excursions into wilderness, usually for several nights or longer, and usually involve skill-based outdoor activities such as backpacking, kayaking, or rock climbing (Dillenschneider, 2007). Groups are encouraged to build and maintain an inclusive, communal living/learning arrangement, often in uncomfortable natural environments (Vernon, 2016). Peppered with intentional learning activities and lessons, these programs often include significant downtime. Programs that are critically oriented integrate social justice-oriented lessons, such as discussions and reflections on privilege, a critical awareness of self and others, and potential resolutions to socially unjust interactions, aiming at positively addressing issues of diversity, inclusion, and social justice (Vernon, 2016).

Vernon (2016) describes an OAEE program that, while not explicitly focused on social justice outcomes, adopts many of the principles of a critical program. This example may be particularly helpful as a resource for outdoor- and adventure-based programs that are interested in augmenting their outcomes to include justice-oriented ones without major program revisions. Outward Bound in America operates a week-long Diversity Program in partnership with public schools, where a cohort of students engage in "developing personal qualities they need to become community leaders and creating a learning culture within which issues of diversity and social justice can be positively addressed" (Vernon, 2016, p. 301). Vernon joined a group as a critical researcher. With an intentionally diverse group of students, the community is encouraged to

> practice an inclusive, democratic lifestyle while simultaneously planning a social change initiative to take up and run together upon returning home… [troubling] the individualized assumptions of contemporary EE by attempting to intersect diverse,

> democratic inclusion with interdependent and critical learning through an ongoing collective practice. (Vernon, 2016, p. 301)

Daily tasks for participants included cooking and cleaning, setting up and storing food via rope-and-pulley system (for safety), map and compass navigation, building primitive tent shelters, and backpacking, rock climbing, and other adventure activities. From a research perspective, Vernon (2016) illuminated the need for dialectic tension between structure and activity for democratic education.

In evaluating the effectiveness of an OAEE program, educators consider three types of learning transfer: specific, non-specific, and metaphoric (Gass, 2008). While OAEE does encourage specific transfer of learned skills, such as rappelling, non-specific and metaphoric transfer of learning is equally, if not more, important. Non-specific and metaphoric transfer refers to utilizing common underlying principles learned in one situation to a future learning experience, such as developing trust or improving communication (Gass, 2008). They are different in that non-specific transfer happens when there is a similar structure to a future learning experience as the one in which the initial learning occurred, such as a group in the wilderness versus in the classroom; metaphoric transfer occurs when a learned principle is generalized, for example when learning how to navigate a canoe with a partner translates into understanding about navigating relationships in any setting (Gass, 2008). In OAEE, participants are encouraged to use their adventure activities and group dynamic experiences for non-specific and metaphoric learning transfer to their home communities (Vernon, 2016). In critical OAEE, participants are nurtured to create inclusive, democratic communities while planning future initiatives in their home communities to foster social change (Vernon, 2016).

Vernon (2016) asserts that learning during OAEE happens often in the unstructured moments between structured activities, and democratic potential may best be realized in those unstructured moments that provide freedom to practice "negotiating experience and its connection with social functioning and individual growth in manners which naturally invade and inform activities within managed educational spaces" (p. 311). That is, in these spaces where we find democratic potential, learners are free to interact with one another in imaginative, collaborative reconstructive relationships, developing habits of critical re-structuring of our social interactions. Thus, this unstructured time appears to be greatly important for critical outdoor education for students to practice critical reflection and action.

Critical Learning Seminar

Simulations can provide engaging experiences with critical social issues, such as poverty; yet without critical attention to underlying assumptions, biases, and systems of power, simulations can perpetuate the systems of oppression they are designed to address (Browne & Roll, 2016). Although seminars are typically not thought of as falling under the umbrella of EE, it is possible to develop one that meets the spirit of EE, adhering to its commitments. One such specialized learning seminar for graduate students of social work, integrating critical, experiential, and Indigenous pedagogies, was designed to enhance participants' contextual and historical knowledge related to working with Native American families in the child welfare system (Johnson-Goodstar, Piescher, & LaLiberte, 2016). This particular example of CEE demonstrates that learning about a critical social issue through actively engaging with the experiences of the Other--of marginalized people, especially of those you will work with to enact change, may be just as powerfully experiential while minimizing the perpetuation of the status quo.

The two day learning seminar was developed and implemented in collaboration with local partners. There were three key components to the seminar: personal narrative and talking circles; experiential and place-based activities; and community center visits. Activities included guest lectures, small group dialogues, historical guided visits, a treaty mapping exercise, ceremony participation, and visits to local Native American youth and family serving agencies. These components highlight the value of critical dialogue, critical reflection, and critical community. Through critical learning experiences, students begin to understand the complexities of laws enacted by state and the federal government to exert power and control over Indigenous communities, and their lasting traumatic impacts.

Similar to CSL, the theme of partnerships emerged. University professors collaborated with Native American community members to inform the design, content, and delivery of the curriculum, which was also co-delivered (Johnson-Goodstar et al., 2016). In this partnership, Native people are considered the experts on their historical experiences and honored for their unique and collective tribal knowledge and stories of resistance. Indigenous community members were guest speakers and engaged in critical conversations with participants; Native elders provided guided visits to historically, culturally, and spiritually significant local sites (Johnson-Goodstar et al., 2016). By participating in ceremonies, engaging in critical reflective dialogue circles—talking circles with students, social work practitioners, and Indigenous community members, and interacting with and reflecting on interpretive centers, participants join with Native folks to form mutually beneficial critical communities.

Critical Curriculum Mapping for Study Abroad

Ohito, Lyiscott, Green, and Wilcox (2021) explore critical curriculum mapping for study abroad programs (SAP), illustrating curricular criticality for both theory and practice via a

collectivist critical curriculum mapping tool. Curriculum mapping details the various expected outcomes and aligned teaching materials, teaching techniques, formal and informal learning activities, and assessments for a course or program. While the mapping itself is not necessarily an enactment of EE, planning curriculum for practice in EE is a greatly important aspect for critical experiential educators, which is why I have included it here.

Research suggests a breadth of beneficial outcomes of SAPs, varying widely based on format--e.g. a college semester, homestay, or group travel, length, student motivation, and the leaders' abilities (Harper, 2018). Outcomes include increasing intercultural sensitivity, cross-cultural adaptability, and cultural awareness, humility, and competence (Olcoń, Gilbert, & Pulliam, 2021; Harper, 2018). However, SAPs have been criticized for being voyeuristic and exploitative (Olcoń et al., 2021) and for not providing critical immersion and encouraging deeper cultural reflection, instead allowing participants to be passive observers (Harper, 2018). This suggests that critical curriculum mapping is essential to planning an SAP that both critically enhances the students' learning experience while also benefiting local communities.

SAPs generally employ dominant Western curricula and tend to overwhelmingly attract White students (Dillard, as referenced in Ohito et al., 2021). Using Western epistemologies, focused on individualism, in curriculum mapping generates linear, inflexible curricula that are insufficient to meet the learning needs of students with collectivist worldviews, such as students of color (Ohito et al., 2021). "This fixedness means the curriculum factors into the 'problematic trends in [SAP] that reproduce hierarchies of power and colonialism, perpetuate views of an exotic cultural 'other', and privilege tourism over education" (Pipitone, as cited in Ohito et al., 2021, p. 14). Thus, curriculum mapping is an issue of equity and must be carefully considered if an SAP is going to be critically oriented.

Applying a Black feminist lens, Ohito et al. (2021) are committed to enacting social change that improves the lives of Black women. Through critical dialogue and collective reflexive narrative, the authors practiced critical curriculum mapping that included lived experience, collective consciousness, and knowledge generation. "Knowledge generation was *both* an anticipated outcome *and* an aspect of our curriculum mapping process" (Ohito et al., 2021). Exemplifying a collectivist critical approach to curriculum mapping, via a Black feminist framework, Ohito et al.'s (2021) work "examines the social, [necro]political, and cultural dynamics of 'knowledge' and 'learning'" (Hendry, as cited in Ohito et al., p. 22-23). Through critical dialogue and reflection, the authors use critical curriculum mapping to create an SAP that embeds equity and inclusion from inception, that decenters whiteness and ensures programming extends from and responds to the lived experiences of BIPOC students and faculty.

Discussion

In the previous section, I considered four expressions of CEE in order to demonstrate how the use of a critical paradigm challenges and changes the ways in which we implement EE, showcasing elements of a CEP. Now, I turn my attention to a more general discussion of a critical re-orientation of EP for those not already practicing CEE—but wish to—within the critical strand.

Experiential educators who want to adopt a critical lens accept the guiding principles and undergirding philosophical assumptions, as previously outlined. CEE sheds a light on the fallacy of neutrality of research and education: education is political and educators are not neutral. Two of the most important skills that an experiential educator can help develop in our students are the abilities to effectively dialogue across differences and to value the co-construction of knowledge. Effective critical dialogue includes learning to listen carefully and with an open mind, setting

aside assumptions and judgment, and sharing ideas thoughtfully, honestly, and humbly (Bettez & Hytten, 2013). We must be open to learning from each other and with each other, approaching the other with an asset-based—as opposed to a deficit-based—mindset. The co-construction of knowledge recognizes the self and the other as mutually constitutive (Bettez & Hytten, 2013). Knowledge becomes relational, shared, and intertwined with another in a way that binds people together. Co-creating knowledge doesn't remove lines of difference, rather co-constructs a path of connection. These connections can be exploited for their social value to extend relational knowledge to social knowledge.

A critical analysis of experiential programming is needed to understand how to critically reorient it. Through an iterative analysis process (Nixon et al., 2017), educators need to consider the following steps[28]:

1. Identify the specific **aspect of practice** to analyze. Examples include the "typical" participant, the setting/environment, time allotted for activities, sequencing of planned activities and unstructured time, and types of reflection activities used.
2. Identify the **intended purposes** of this practice. Consider alignment between the specific aspect and program outcomes. For instance, the choice of a wilderness location might be intended for participants to commune with nature.
3. Uncover **assumptions** that support intended purposes. Consider what assumptions must be shared in order for a tacit common understanding of intended purposes. Case in point, it

[28] Adapted from Nixon et al.'s (2017) 7-step framework to think deeply and carefully about the intended and unintended consequences of actions—including professional practices, ways of speaking, and visual representations—in order to reflect on and grow the field of physical therapy. The purpose of critical analysis is to foster dialogue that assists clinicians, researchers, and students of physical therapy to uncover new insights about the impacts of their everyday actions.

could be assumed that to commune with nature, participants need an experience uninterrupted by other people or groups, thus a remote wilderness location.

4. Identify **who benefits** from the practice. For example, for an expeditionary course, if it is assumed that participants will feel more comfortable in their own gear, participants who already have gear and those who can afford expensive equipment benefit from not having to use shared gear.
5. Identify **who is disadvantaged** by the practice. For a wilderness experience, a remote location with additional travel time in favor of a more conveniently-located setting might hinder those who are unable to leave responsibilities for a longer period of time from participating.
6. Connect privilege and marginalization to **societal patterns**, systemic and structural. Examples to consider include ableism, racism and xenophobia, bigotry, queerphobia, sexism, and classism.
7. Develop **alternative practices** that mitigate actual or potential harm. Returning to the example about use of personal gear, a program might normalize using common gear whenever possible to destigmatize an inability to afford expensive gear.

Critically reorienting praxis within EE will likely require cycling through this analysis process recursively multiple times in order to address the many aspects of a unique program.

Ricks, Meerts-Brandsma, and Sibthorp (2021) examine the impact of a semester-long EE program on students' self-authorship, which is "the concept of being internally guided to construct one's identity, beliefs, and relationships" (p. 66) and impacts students' capacity to self-direct. Comprised of three domains—epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal—self-authorship describes the development of the self, distinguished from the other, in thoughts,

feelings, and relationships. Without self-authorship, students come to rely on external authorities, which can lead to an anti-critical mindset, lacking in critical thinking but unquestioning in acceptance of the authorities' perspectives (Ricks et al., 2021). Ricks et al. (2021) found that students who attended a Semester School program, when compared to a control peer group, had shifted their decision-making process to include a stronger intrapersonal (understanding of self-identity and personal beliefs that influence behavior) self-knowledge. In other words, these students began "navigating relationships based on personal values and not external social pressures" (p. 75). Students identified one aspect of their overall experience that significantly influenced their growth was the reflection and dialogue in which they engaged, including round table discussions, debates, and journaling (p. 77).

While participation in the experiential Semester School programs has many positive benefits (Meerts-Brandsma et al., 2019), Ricks et al. (2019) research was significantly lacking critical components[29]. In order to critically reorient the Semester School programs, particularly to consider their impact on self-authorship, I am going to complete a cycle of critical analysis described above.

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[29] For example, they did not discuss research along any lines of difference, demonstrating an oversight of how diversity identities process experiences differently. They discuss identity formation, transitioning from authority to self-authority (p. 66-67), but do not consider issues of authoritarianism, power-over, or power-with in the development of self-authority. Authors suggest self-authority includes making sense of their world, yet their presentation of the idea indicates an implied sense of neutrality in that world and equal opportunity to access the world. They once recognize a dominant narrative exists and marginalized people experience the world differently (p. 68), but do not address it elsewhere in their work. As researchers, they do not locate themselves in their work, presenting their work and research subjects as neutral participants in the knowledge creation process. Research questions Ricks et al. shared did not include any questions to interrogate beliefs, assumptions, or power relations. For example, they asked about internal or personal beliefs (p. 75), however, researchers did not investigate with students how their beliefs were cultivated through a hegemonic lens, presenting personal beliefs as neutral. Research was not conducted within a critical community.

1. Aspect of practice: *methods of reflection*. The methods and approaches to reflective practice have a great impact on learning outcomes. For example, debate can be used effectively to share ideas and build consensus, but can also be used to create factions and create contention in groups.
2. Intended purpose: *process of self-discovery to find true self, as opposed to externally imposed self*. Reflection for developing a true sense of self leads to learners who are more autonomous, self-directing, potentially critical thinking beings.
3. Assumptions: *personal values are inherent and neutral*. Personal beliefs are cultivated through a hegemonic lens, one that reflects dominant norms. Personal values and beliefs can never be seen as neutral as they are influenced by external forces, not developed outside of them; they are not latent values that are inherent and need to be discovered.
4. Who benefits: *members of the dominant group*. This could be tied to dominant identities within the group and members of dominant identity groups. For example, in a group of people of color, learners are both members of the dominant group and the marginalized group as a non-white person.
5. Who is disadvantaged: *members of marginalized communities*. See above.
6. Societal patterns: *marginalized individuals develop self-authorship more quickly than privileged peers*. Baxter Magolda et al. (2010) found adolescents and young adults from marginalized groups advance towards self-authorship before their peers with greater privilege, likely as they must question and address external forces—dominant normative structures—sooner that peers that fit into those structures (as referenced in Ricks et al., 2019).

7. Alternative practices: ***critical*** *reflection*. When students are reflection on their own values and beliefs, particularly as juxtapose to external authorities' values, incorporating a critical lens will help them to consider how dominant norms impact their personal beliefs; their responsibility shaping society—instead of being shaped by it—and what kind of society they value; and how their personal beliefs impact their behaviors regarding how they treat others.

Each iteration of the critical analysis cycle examining program aspects will help further a more critical reorientation. This process can also be applied to programs that are considered critically oriented already to deepen the criticality and potential critical benefits.

When considering the effectiveness of CEP, it is important to recall that "effectiveness" is a measure of the ability of a process to reliably result in the intended outcomes (Biesta, 2010). While measuring the effectiveness of outcomes relating to content knowledge may be reasonable, when students are engaged in knowledge creation, particularly regarding non-cognitive ways of knowing, similar outcomes may not be expected or even desirable. Thus, questions of effectiveness must always be within the context of "Effective for what?" and "Effective for whom?" (Biesta, 2010, p. 14). With this in mind, the next section considers the implications of research and practice in CEE.

Implications

Experiential educators who research and practice in the romantic or pragmatic strands should consider critically reflecting on their work to determine if they are meeting the commitments of EE, vis-a-vis exploring "issues of values, relationship, diversity, inclusion, and community" (Itin, 1999, p. 93) and truly engaging socially, and not just relationally, connecting learning outcomes to their larger communities. If/when they determine their non-critical practice is not developing socially responsible learners—as opposed to responsibility that is individually

or relationally focused, they should work with colleagues with experience in the critical strand to critically reorient their practice in order to fulfill EE's maximum educational potential.

Educators should be—and critical educators make themselves—aware of the implicit, null, and hidden curricula embedded within all formal curriculum. The implicit curriculum is students' understanding of how teaching and learning are organized and implemented (Beames, Higgins, & Nicol, 2012). The null curriculum, defined by what is missing, that is, what is left out of the formal curriculum or spaces that are not used, becomes invisible yet tacitly accepted and understood. Closely related is the hidden curriculum, described by Giroux and Penna as the "'transmission of norms, values, and beliefs conveyed in both the formal educational context and the social interactions within these schools' that leads to an attitude or approach to living in society" (as cited in Beames, Higgins, & Nicol, 2012, p. 17). Perhaps the null and hidden curricula say more about what is valued in education than what is explicit in the formal curriculum.

CEE's guiding principles can be used to expose and remediate the null and hidden curricula that do not align with critical values. For example, the outdoor orientation program for incoming medical students that Kercheval et al. (2022) studied (see Chapter 2) is not critically oriented. The null curriculum of the program includes a lack of discussion about how intersectional identities, particularly of those from marginalized groups, may impact students' sense of belonging and heighten imposter syndrome. Participants expressed gratitude for finding supportive classmates to help ease anxieties (Kercheval et al., 2022), yet the study did not include an analysis of how welcoming the medical school environment is that causes such anxiety. An example of part of the hidden curriculum of the orientation program is the belief that students need to adapt to the medical school climate of emotional fatigue and burnout instead of

medical schools working to minimize fatigue and support students from burnout. If students experience burnout, they're not good enough to become doctors.

A critical curriculum, either formal or informal, could address these issues through intentional planning. In applying a critical perspective to the curriculum, the program would attend to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, especially for marginalized students, whether through separate activities or by interweaving critical dialogue into existing activities. Further, in the spirit of social change, program activities would encourage students to question the underlying practices of medical school programs that cause high emotional exhaustion, higher risk of alcohol abuse, and suicidal ideation, when medical students matriculate with lower rates of burnout than other college graduates (Brazeau et al., as referenced in Kercheval et al., 2022). Due to the structural power imbalance between medical school administration and students, it is unlikely for students to take critical action; however, eventually, those same administrators and faculty will be replaced with former students, at which point participants have the power to enact critical changes.

There is great value in applying new perspectives to current problems to see it afresh. Researchers and practitioners in the critical strand should review best practices in other social justice-oriented pedagogies, such as queer pedagogy (e.g. Nemi Neto, 2018) or feminist pedagogy (e.g. Villaverde, 2007), to continue to grow their critical practice. For example, drawing from literature focused on social justice pedagogy, Pickering (2021) offers suggestions as to how to respond to emotionally-charged news within the learning environment. He reminds us that "avoiding local, national, and world news is often difficult, and perhaps irresponsible" (p. 121) when outcomes should include a social justice orientation. While discussions can be emotionally taxing and leave participants vulnerable and anxious, they can be helpful for

students to learn to cope with trauma in order to facilitate future learning (Pickering, 2021). This practice can be borrowed from social justice pedagogy and integrated into the practice of a CEP in order to help the educator "lean in" to moments of discomfort.

Educators in all strands, regardless of orientation, should heed the call-to-action to work towards making the world a better place for our students—and for us. Whether for personal, relational, or societal improvements, all experiential educators recognize that education is political and action is essential for change. Since critical experiential educators seek socially just change through critical action, they should encourage learners to become involved—and become involved themselves—in activities that support lasting societal change. Examples include attending protests, supporting legal actions, engaging in critical community service, reinvesting in the community, mentoring, educating others, providing input for community planning, and fighting for policy changes.

Limitations

Experiential learning (EL) is a pedagogical tool used frequently in EE (see Chapter 2). According to Rose and Paisley (2012), practical definitions of EL "tend to focus on psychological, sociological, and developmental aspects of information intake, processing, and transfer, but they tend to overlook systemic social inequalities" (p. 143). EE scholars must take a more proactive approach to criticism, particularly in the critical strand, to stay current. In rebuke of individualistic orientations of EL, we must work to connect individual goals with social purposes (Seaman, Brown, & Quay, 2017). We must resist the commodification of experience that reproduces dominant ideology, exacerbating marginalization. EL, utilized uncritically, risks democratic participation in favor of consumption, becoming part of a larger problem with trends in education.

One of the biggest challenges in the practice of EE is that it is never meant to be prescriptive, which is especially true for CEE (Breunig, 2009, p. 250). By its nature, education is messy. Scholar-practitioners must resist the desire to develop universal experiential approaches, and instead critically reflect on success and failures of approaches in context. In doing so, we avoid a major pitfall of the trend towards positivistic approaches attempting to prescribe pedagogical techniques following well-defined, schematic models of EL (Seaman, Brown, & Quay, 2017). Instead of seeking to make "experiential learning" educational, we must design educational activities from within the context of CEE; we cannot co-opt EE as reduced to a model in order to justify pedagogic conduct.

Additional responsibilities make the educator's role more difficult in CEE. They are responsible for utilizing the physical and social environment to maximize students' experiences within many contexts, while engaging in content, arousing curiosity, encouraging connections from past to future experiences, and supporting students in their efforts to be critical. There must be a strong curricular justification for implementing any method or philosophy of pedagogy, but this is complicated by the lack of examples of experiential approaches within certain curricular areas. Often focused on activity-specific theory (e.g., service learning or outdoor adventure), there are few resources detailing how to enact EL within certain subjects, such as math. In situations in which the curriculum is implemented through an experiential lens, adhering to the tenets of EE may be limited. Breunig (2017) acknowledges some of the institutional constraints when teaching experientially within a traditional setting. This may be due to a fundamental difference in the expectations of learning outcomes for mainstream education and EE (Lindsay & Ewert, 2008)—and more so for CEE, particularly that mainstream education is especially concerned with knowledge-as-information, particularly technical skills and positivistic

knowledge, while EE's goals focus more on individual and social growth, competency development, and knowledge-as-wisdom[30]. Thus, CEE may be difficult to implement in all types of situations; programs need to be developed as models, which is a substantial undertaking in most contexts. These limitations may deter educators from taking the experiential route.

Outcomes in EE tend to have more variability among learners because it prioritizes deeper learning. In CEE, variability will increase more so due to participants' various identities and past experiences with power and privilege. Consequently, it can be difficult to standardize outcomes, which is central to traditional education, where transmission and memorization are favored modes of knowledge production. As we grapple with our current love affair with accountability and standardization (e.g. Biesta, 2023), CEE becomes forced to continually seek validation as a legitimate practice. Part of the problem might be traditional education's focus on the acquisition of technical skills and positivistic knowledge in service of industry. Our attention is then directed at *learning* instead of the broader aims of *education*. In doing so, learning becomes a marketable commodity (Biesta, as referenced in Seaman, Brown, & Quay, 2017). Learning must be (re)positioned within education more broadly.

Areas for Further Research

Future directions for research identified in the literature include reasserting the humanistic principles of EE in the face of neoliberal educational policy (Bourgault du Coudray, 2020); introducing new theoretical perspectives within the scholarship of experience and learning (Seaman et al., 2017); examining factors that encourage or discourage place-based experiences in formal education, considering practices outside of North America (which most EE

[30] For a further discussion of knowledge as wisdom versus information, see Dewey (1997, p. 52).

research does not), assessing factors that limit facilitation within CEE, continuing improvements on the EL model "including whether the arrows should be bidirectional rather than unidirectional and whether concrete experience should be assigned as the starting point," and examining how the learning spiral becomes more complex with maturity (Morris, 2020, p. 1073); and integrating concepts of critical community building into EL communities (Small & Varker, 2021). Like the term experience, the idea of *community* in education is so widely used, we take its meaning for granted (Bettez & Hytten, 2013). More research is needed on what type of learning community is ideal for the practice of a CEP, what community building looks like in CEE, what conditions are necessary to form a critical experiential community, and how to establish the conditions under which they can develop organically.

As with both EE and critical pedagogies, more empirical research in CEE is needed to assess the practical value beyond anecdotal evidence. Assessment tools for learning and self-assessment tools for the educator within CEP need to be explored. Future empirical studies to test the efficacy of CEP as both an experiential and critical pedagogy are needed to gauge its fidelity to EE and a critical perspective; that is, is it accomplishing the goals of each parent praxis? Further research to determine the general applicability and suggestions for practice within the scope of the field would be a highly effective tool to promote widespread practice of CEP within the gamut of sectors of the EE field. Finally, I propose that a productive future project includes exploring a curriculum designed to prepare educators working across all types of EE—for example, K-12 and higher education instructors, outdoor facilitators, and community mentors—to engage a CEP in their praxis (of course, through a critical experiential program).

Conclusion

The interest of educators utilizing a CEP extends beyond immediate learning outcomes of the task at hand being oriented towards social justice. While the experiential educator is concerned with drawing on past experiences for current learning and connecting it to future situations, the educator employing a CEP is also interested in the qualities of the outcomes of future experiences. CEP is invested in critically re-orienting students such that they are able to view future experiences through a critical lens resulting in future outcomes that are social justice-oriented. As the experiential educator hopes to develop students' capacity for reflection and connection, the critical experiential educator intends to develop critical reflection skills and an orientation towards critical action. Further, CEP recognizes that the experience incorporated into the initial learning process may not be highly disruptive. It may fit neatly into the student's organizational structure of previous experiences and knowledge; it may not be too unexpected, too uncomfortable, nor too jarring. However, when students begin to examine their experiences more critically, they may find future experiences to be more disruptive. In this sense, CEP seeks to create a pattern of interruption that reiteratively disrupts notions of power, privilege, and the status quo.

CEP encourages the kind of critical reflection to be undertaken by participants that situates our own experiences, beliefs, and values within a larger social, historical, and political context; reveals unexamined assumptions; acknowledges oppressive norms; and pushes us to both recognize our complicity in maintaining these norms and consider how we might work to dismantle oppressive systems. It asks more from students in that they must not only contextualize their experiences in broader sociopolitical and historical context, but to examine

their own beliefs and values and to consider the Other's experience, to make familiar the strange and make strange the familiar (Roberts, 2012).

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