Democracy & Education

"How to be Nice *and* Get What You Want"
Structural Referents of "Self" and "Other" in Experiential Education as (Un)Democratic Practice

Franklin Vernon

Abstract

This critical ethnography explores a social justice program utilizing nontraditional, democratic, "experiential" education practices. The author posits a historical legacy of pedagogy of self obscures its emancipatory, democratic potential while simultaneously expanding on contemporary discourses of self and other as aspects of the educational setting. Students' labors to reference and enact oppressive, capitalistic idealizations of either self or other problematizes pragmatic theories of self, and the author draws upon critical pragmatism to reposition self and other as aspects of pedagogy and curriculum in democratic education.

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I N HER HISTORICAL critique of experiential learning theory, Michelson (1999) considered the isolation of self-as-learner paranoid of outside influence—what she called the "privatizing of body and mind" (p. 140)—to be the primary pitfall of the post-Enlightenment experiential learning (EL) movement. Such isolation, wherein learners are encouraged to individually and internally construct personally useful knowledge from an external, asocial environment such as that promoted within learning cycles literature (e.g., Kolb, 1984), is argued to hamper democratic participation by adopting isolated, cognitivist approaches to learning and growth (Vernon, 2013, 2014). Some form of this conversation of the isolated learner and subsequent issues with democratic learning has been recurring in experiential learning theory for over a decade (e.g., Fenwick, 2001; Miettinen, 2000; Seaman & Nelsen, 2011; Vernon, 2013), yet surprisingly little systematic research has been accomplished that looks into the particulars of the potential for educational programming drawing on EL theory to set the conditions for an interdependent, democratic learning environment (see also Rheingold, 2012; Seaman & Rheingold, 2013; Vernon, 2014). In this paper, I present data and analyses from my own research, adding to this literature. In tandem with a decade of scholarly critique, my interactions with

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experiential educators throughout this research indicated that most were largely unaware of theoretical work in EL outside of or beyond learning cycles discourses (see also Miettinen, 2000; Seaman, 2008), pointing to a need to intersect substantive, interactional research on democratic learning with contemporary practices among EL communities while maintaining an active connection with a literature that does not appear to have become practically dated, despite some academic pleas to render it so (e.g., Miettinen, 2000; Vernon, 2013).

In this paper I employ a critical, shifting text (Babich, 1994) to entwine genres and present my own ethnographic research and analyses regarding a contemporary—and on many levels commendable, though here I focus on a problematic fixture—educational program influenced by EL. From June through August of 2013, I joined an American-style Outward Bound school (A-OB) as an ethnographer to study both the organization and a unique, experiential education (EE) setting: what I am titling the Diversity Program, a cluster of courses partnered with public school systems in one particular state aimed at creating a democratic setting of "a learning culture within which issues of diversity and social justice can be positively addressed" (American Outward Bound [A-OB], n.d.). When analyzing data from the study, *self* and *other* arose as central concepts for addressing the question of democratic education within this contemporary example of EE, which draws on EL theory—particularly within individual-constructivist traditions (e.g., Kolb, 1984)—for curricular and pedagogical direction; these concepts of self and other will be the primary mode through which I hope to unwarp a discussion of (un)democratic learning activity which pushes out from discussions of the "isolated self."

My ethnographic relationship with A-OB and the Diversity Program had three distinct stages: First, I quite literally lived in the A-OB administrative offices of the school, sleeping on the floor at night, where I collected and analyzed documents from the library and Diversity Program files and interviewed and observed administrative staff; second, I was embedded within a co-instructor team for 12 days as an observer and peripheral participant while the two co-educators planned, ran, and wrapped up a Diversity Course; and third, I traveled to the city where the nine Diversity students were from to meet with them as well as to interview the staff who oversaw the public school's commitment to the program. Throughout my study, the primary question driving my research was: In what manners can EL–inspired education, and more specifically outdoor adventure–based experiential education (OEE), act as a site for education for democracy? My primary interactions with the Diversity Program research participants concluded in the spring of 2014; this paper reports on data from the summer of 2013 and focuses specifically on a key aspect of the course curriculum and pedagogy that played a central role in their interactions, and which raises perspectives germane to discourses of self and critiques of isolation in EL theory: the organizationally idealized education of self/other generations and interactions among participants.

Outward Bound and Self

The United States' Outward Bound schools began in 1962 to provide outdoor adventure–based, experiential programming to the American public, such as school systems, camps, and communities, as well as the global public through open-enrollment programs (A-OB, n.d.; Miner & Boldt, 2002) within the wild areas of the country. The particular A-OB school I studied is a charter member of the larger Outward Bound International (OBI), which is made up of a collection of Outward Bound schools in over forty countries around the world; the United States alone is now home to dozens of Outward Bound schools offering educational programming to diverse student groups in both urban and wilderness settings.

Outward Bound originated in the United Kingdom during World War II as the brainchild of businessman Lawrence Holt and educator Kurt Hahn (Miner & Boldt, 2002). The earliest schools used a mixture of outdoor adventure with "a reasonable element of danger" (Hahn, 1949), such as sailing or mountaineering coupled with rescue training, to encourage young males toward a holistic and nationalistic passion for Christian service (Hahn, 1949, p. 8). Hahn's educational philosophy was a hybridization of Romance-inspired *Allgemeinbildung* (Klafki, 2000; Rohrs, 1966); the conservative and sexually repressive pedagogy of British educator Cecil Reddie (Darling, 1981; Hahn, 1949); and the aristocratic politics of a 19th-century Enlightenment interpretation of Platonic philosophy (e.g., Hahn, 1934; see also van Oord, 2010; Worsley, 1985). It should also be no surprise that Hahn, who was born into an aristocratic German family and raised in both British and German school systems, should show the influences of both educational traditions.

Whilst little discussed in English-speaking academic circles, the German educational philosophy of *Bildung* is ubiquitous throughout central Europe (Westbury, 2000). Lacking a direct translation, the concept—of which there are many iterations throughout nearly three centuries of literature—deals with the self-origination and growth of an individual-in-culture in such a manner as to develop and use one's intelligence to benefit humanity (Klafki, 2000; Lüth, 2000). Whereas *Bildung* is sometimes organized into specific subject matter, *Allgemeinbildung* can be thought of as a general, or whole-curriculum, *Bildung*, through which individuals work to develop the possibilities of their full human powers in manners that directly impact culture and society (Klafki, 2000). Hahn, when translating his pedagogy for an English audience, used the term *grande passion* (Hahn, 1934, 1949) to articulate this self-originating power, and felt that a student's manifestation of a grande passion should mark the development of a curriculum around the child. To illustrate, in addresses and speeches he often referenced students who, under his care, would discover an innate, grande passion for a particular human discipline, such as art or medicine, and the indelible impact on local and national societies these students went on to have (e.g., Hahn, 1949, 1960).

Children's energies through which they could discover and commit to a grande passion, in Hahn's view, were unfortunately short-lived and easily corruptible. Situated within the Romantic

movement (see also Darling, 1981), Hahn feared that society and civilization had a nefarious influence on young boys during adolescence. He argued:

> Where the public school fails is in the protection of adolescence; loyalties draw their vitality from an intact inner strength . . . it can survive adolescence, but only on one condition, if on the threshold of puberty, healthgiving [sic] passions are stirred. (Hahn, 1949, pp. 4–5)

That is, Hahn felt that the innate purity of young males' passions were corrupted by sexual development if allowed to occur within a sexualized society; removal to an 'innocent' setting—such as the ocean or mountainside, coupled with physical exercise to further delay puberty—would allow for the passionate loyalties necessary for a lifelong *Allgemeinbildung* to crystalize. Left in civilization, Hahn feared young boys would be left "at the mercy of impulses that well up during puberty and which impatiently and insidiously struggle for satisfaction" (Hahn, 1949, p. 5); Outward Bound offered an "island of healing" (Hahn, 1949, p. 6), isolating young boys long enough to hopefully "[re-]assemble the dispersed soul of the modern young" (Hahn, 1949, p. 8). This cultural organization of selfhood, what I am describing as the intersubjectively idealized symbolic spaces and places an individual is socially referenced to and constrained by—whom I will refer to as the *inherent self*—was to be drawn out via a holistic curriculum and bolstered by an educational system toward a lifelong movement of human completeness. The *inherent* self can be thought of as one of the first iterations within this particular educational lineage.

These retreats to the outdoors as an escape from society and sexual development was not new during early 20th century British education (or American; see Armstrong, 1990), although his direct tie to theories of Bildung made for a unique pedagogy of self. Reddie's tenure as headmaster at the private boarding school Abbotsholme was marked by a similar Romantic-era belief structure (Darling, 1981), and it was a book about Reddie and Abbotsholme that sparked Hahn to give up his studies to be an art historian and instead move into education (van Oord, 2010). However, Reddie, like much the rest of the Western English-speaking world at the time, drew from a view of self as something to be molded or instilled from the outside (Campbell, 1987; Freeman, 2010; Michelson, 1999). This cultural organization of self, whom I am referring to as the *instilled self*, was philosophically challenged by the Enlightenment and Romantic periods (Michelson, 1999) and not necessarily in line with Hahn's Germanic educational philosophy, but the patriotic and religious institutional structuring of Western cultures maintained the instilled self as the dominant educational perspective into the mid-20th century (Armstrong, 1990; Campbell, 1987). Thus, it is possible to describe Hahn's work as a bringing together of various educational traditions during a time where cultural norms regarding a pedagogy of self were likewise shifting toward something like—but not the same as—an inherent self, and this may have made Hahn's work appear more progressive within the educational system than it was (see also Worsley, 1985).

Hahn's work in this area was delayed by his service in World War I, but after the war ended, he quickly began a private school that tested his educational philosophy. Hahn's first school venture was funded by Maximilian Alexander Friedrich Wilhelm, Prince of Baden, the last Imperial Chancellor of the German Empire, and for whom Hahn was the private secretary (Miner & Boldt, 2002; van Oord, 2010). This was the Schule Schloss Salem, founded in 1920 in Salem, Germany; the school, fitting Hahn's Platonic leanings and longstanding relationships with European aristocracy, was designed to attract the future generations of ruling elite (van Oord, 2010; Worsley, 1985). Among the school's notable alumni were members of European royal families, children of military leaders, and the children of prominent scholars, authors, actors, and business executives, and although briefly closed during World War II, it reopened in 1945 and remains one of the most elite boarding schools in Europe (Schule Schloss Salem, n.d.).

After the then-Jewish Hahn (he converted to Christianity later in life) immigrated to Scotland from Nazi-controlled Germany in June of 1933—the stories of this process are both oft-repeated and sometimes contradictory in Hahnian lore (e.g., Miner & Boldt, 2002; Worsley, 1985)—he used his considerable connections and tenuous acceptance into the British new progressive education movement (Darling, 1981; Worsley, 1985) to found his second school, Gordonstoun. This school likewise primarily catered to the European aristocracy; one of many notable pupils—Prince Charles, whose father had been a student of Hahn's in both Germany and Scotland—referred to Hahn's school climate as "Colditz in kilts" (Wilson, 2013), referencing the German WWII prisoner of war camp. Older boys in Hahn's school were known to physically abuse young entrants, even by "taking a pair of pliers to their arms and twisting until the flesh tore open" (Wilson, 2013). Other educators at the time also noted a striking resemblance between Hahn's tenure as headmaster and the youth development climate of the country he had left behind (Darling, 1981; Worsley, 1985). It was here at Gordonstoun, just as Schule Schloss Salem was being taken over by the German SS, that Outward Bound first started, and in the early days it was heavily influenced by Hahn's educational philosophy (Freeman, 2010; Miner & Boldt, 2002), one in which democratic, emancipatory education was of little interest (Worsley, 1985). In other words, this particular lineage of educational programming is one of aristocratic and repressive—if not oppressive—pedagogical practices, and its history is worth noting when venturing into contemporary practices, wherein a sort of hagiographic idealization of Hahn's legacy has been more commonly accessible in the literature (e.g., Association for Experiential Education, n.d.; Minor & Boldt, 2002).

Shifting Cultural Claims to Self

By the 1960s, ongoing social and economic revolutions in Western culture, such as the civil rights movement and post-industrial capitalism, were openly challenging the prewar normalization of self-education as a nationalistic, if not militaristic endeavor, and ushered in a more complete transition to an already-occurring reorganization of self along individualistic terms (for an early recognition and description of this shift, see Dewey, 1916, 1929),

whom I will tentatively refer to as the *individuated* or *isolated self* (cf. Michelson, 1999). This change in selfhood, experiential learning, and youth development (referred to hereafter as 'the shift') has been documented elsewhere (e.g., Armstrong, 1990; Michelson, 1999; Millikan, 2006; Wills, 2005), and Outward Bound's longstanding ties to Allgemeinbildung, wherein individuals were thought to manifest innate powers which must be tended, "and needed to be drawn out rather than put in" (Freeman, 2010, p. 32), appeared to resonate during the English-speaking adoption of self-determination within post-industrial capitalism (Campbell, 1987).

By the 1960s, Outward Bound was caught up in the same trend much of the Western educational community was in: Theory and research had been largely unsuccessful at identifying ways to ascertain character as a stable concept simultaneously malleable enough to be substantially influenced by a single educational episode (Brookes, 2003; Freeman, 2010; Roberts, White, & Parker, 1974). Also, the institution-to-individual pathway of influence was rapidly being replaced by a concept of self as uniquely and internally organized for the purposes of autonomously controlled growth and individually arrived-at meaning (cf. Dewey, 1922; Kaldec, 2007; Michelson, 1999). This was not a holistic replacing of *instilled* for *isolated*, hence my use of the term shift, but should be thought of as a prioritization of discourse. Outward Bound continued to refer to groups of students as patrols, hearkening back to its militaristic roots, but post-1960 literature highlighted concepts like self-discovery above character training (Freeman, 2010). A popular manifesto at the time defined the outcomes of American Outward Bound participation as the ability of a student to "[reorganize] the meaning or significance of his [sic] experience or existence and the ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (Walsh & Golins, 1976, p. 13) while never mentioning Hahn. There has been a resurgence of interest in Hahn's educational legacy over the last two decades in Outward Bound and larger experiential education scholarship (e.g., Brookes, 2003; James, 2000; Miner & Boldt, 2002), and the A-OB educational environment I entered for this study appeared influenced both by its historical legacy as well as by pseudo-contemporary discourses in EL scholarship (see also Quay and Seaman, 2013; Vernon, 2013).

The proceeding overview of Outward Bound was necessary, in my mind, for two reasons worth foregrounding (and others that will remain backgrounded). First, and most important, to continue with this paper it is worth destabilizing assumptions of a permanent, individual *self* transcending the curriculum and pedagogy of this—or any—educational system. I will not be using this space to go into philosophical discussions of a permanent certainty of self from a subjective position (although a careful reader should be able to discern some arguments I may put forth on that topic), but I would point out that cultural-normative claims have and do shift, and educational systems do potentially serve as settings where students are taught to claim selves normalized within ideological contours (see also Tobin, 1995), and it is the cultural-educational self that is of interest here. Second, and related, Outward Bound appears to have historically idealized self as either hidden-yet-innate or autonomous-and-asocial, which logically situates

pedagogy of self outside a sphere of academic interest and an unnecessary reflective concept for many educators, administrators, and researchers within the system. That is, the question of "what *type* of self do we teach students to have?" may be nonsensical from within the dominant conceptualizations, and, to me, this marks the topic as of critical importance.

Instead, the more contemporary of the two self-concepts espoused within individual-cognitivist models of learning and the curricular structures they have influenced (e.g., Kolb, 1984) has been favored by academia and is more supportive of pre-post, outcomes-based research (in which an idealized, normative self would be reified in objectifications). Indeed, fictionalizing a normative self as objective variables and measuring individual psychological markers, such as self-confidence or attitudes through self-reported Likert-type scales, became commonly relied upon among this educational community early on (Ewert, 1987), and self-system changes remain the preferred foci of research (e.g., Beightol, Jevertson, Carter, Gray, & Gass, 2011; Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997).

Yet, simultaneously, Hahn's Allgemeinbildung influence appears in a number of A-OB's institutional artifacts, most notably a maximum often referenced and attributed as the motto of Gordonstoun: *plus est en vous*, which translates literally as "there is more in you." That is, the other interpretation of changes to self resulting from participation, with durable appeal to educators, is that the *innate* self has been revealed and strengthened; as described by Outward Bound:

> *The shirker and the leader are equally revealed. Self-control has led to self-respect. Self-confidence has grown and life has been given a purpose and a sense of service encouraged. Such experiences must influence a boy's attitude towards life and strengthen his character. (Outward Bound Trust, 1959, p. 15)*

As a counter, this study reports instead on data exploring the organized teaching of self and other within the curriculum and pedagogy of the Diversity Program educational setting as not internal and subjective, but rather through references to imaginary, cultural-normative self and other (more on this soon), and how this shaped the potential for interaction amongst the community members.

Research Methods, Setting, and Researcher Roles

The Diversity Program is organized, at the root, around a normative-political claim that an egalitarian and inclusive social existence is preferred over contemporary forms of separation and hegemonic social structure, and further, that the educational system can and should play a role in social re-structuring toward a more just existence (A-OB, n.d.). Due to the foregrounded nonobjective and otherwise political learning intentions of the program and staff, a research practice that allows a researcher to directly grapple with such claims is necessary to satisfactorily understand and discuss the complexity of the educational system. Critical ethnography (Carspecken, 1996) provides a robust example of a nuanced approach to analyzing and articulating this

complexity; the data presented and discussed here is drawn from a larger study of the Diversity Program that employed this method.

I entered the ethnographic setting as an insider (see also Holyfield & Jonas, 2003), having spent a number of years as an educator in American OEE. In many ways this aided in my appropriation of the role of peripheral participant and ethnographic observer (Carspecken, 1996). These educational settings often rely on uncomfortable or otherwise jarring environments to facilitate group cohesion and initiate holistic lifestyles of learning for intense, short-lived periods of time, and my preexisting ease with the transition from academic office to backpack and sleeping bag made it easier for me to navigate the research site and setting. That is, my understanding of the physical and psychological requirements necessary to develop a sense of maintenance and stability in wilderness settings allowed for added energies to be focused on data generation as well as grasping the nuances of the educational structure that may have otherwise been missed while managing the distractions of biting flies, rain, heat, etc.

The methodological details of this larger study are discussed in depth elsewhere (Vernon, in press), but it may be valuable to contextualize certain aspects. Data for this study were generated through observations coupled with jottings, field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1996), photographs, and oftentimes audio recordings; informal as well as semistructured interviews with students, educators, and administrators, totaling 312 hours of direct observation and interviewing; and institutional artifacts including lesson plans, curriculum manuals and guides, group journals, marketing materials, and course reports. The particulars of the educational structures (curriculum) and interactions (pedagogy) in relation to the idealizations of and teachings of self and other are the primary data drawn upon for this discussion. The vignettes that follow are reconstructions of educational interactivities, in which audio-recorded dialogue (in italics) is intersected with my jottings, field notes, and analytical explications fleshing out a full account, inviting readers to interact within and associate with or disassociate from.

Data analyses were mainly informed by communicative pragmatism and Carspecken's (1996) explications of critical theory, including the utilization of meaning field and reconstructive horizon analyses, which are analytic practices meant to disrupt assumptive meaning-making and explicate the otherwise implicit, which occurs in much coding schema. That is, analyses were marked by dialectic and recursive interplay of emic and etic. Readers more familiar with constructivist or some generic forms of qualitative inquiry methodology, who may be anticipating terms like trustworthiness or saturation (see also O'Reilly & Parker, 2013), are encouraged to seek out Carspecken's (1996) text for a more complete explanation of qualitative inquiry informed by critical theory than can be satisfactorily provided in this empirical article. I do wish to briefly highlight self as an analyzable concept.

Methodology of Self

Of the variety of analyses employed by critical researchers, Carspecken's (1996) exploration of *meaning field* and *reconstructive horizon* analyses were particularly useful in discussing structural and interactive claims to or referent acts of self. Both analyses make explicit that which is implicit—yet intersubjectively grasped—in communicative acts. When communicating in understandable manners, there are a cohort of truth claims that the actor rests her validity on: objective, subjective, normative, and identity claims; likewise, for a communicative act to be grasped and understood, there must be a bracketed range of potential meanings conveyed (Carspecken, 1996). On the surface, it would appear an exploration of identity claims within the context of the educational setting setting best suits the discussion of self, but this was not the case, as I was engaging in an understanding of self as a cultural-normative activity, rather than as a subjective reveal. In some ethnographic research within EL settings, *self* and *identity* have been used interchangeably (e.g., Holyfield & Fine, 1997); I wish here to briefly draw a distinction between the two, with a more elaborate discussion being retained for a following paper.

Identities, or the labeling of *I* and *you* with specific markers, and the meaningful interactions, roles, emotions, values, and so on that result from these labels (e.g., Carspecken, 1996; Mead, 1934), are what I might refer to as a meso-level construct in social sciences. Identity is acted out in manners partially accessible to and explicable by both actors and onlookers (although perhaps with some effort). That is, identity claims can be grasped primarily through individual actions and inactions yet are shaped in profoundly social and interactive manners and point toward a macro-level self type. Self, to contrast, has been sometimes understood as a culturally determined sense of wholeness (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991) or of one's own symbolic place and space in social existence as well as historically throughout a life course (Mead, 1934). In other words, self is a concept often relegated to either structural or subjective; more recent pragmatic theorizations have furthered the work of Mead by drawing the subjective into interactivity (e.g., Brandom, 1985), and I argue the work of Mead and Brandom may be extended to a prior, systemic self, best approached through normative claims when drawing from Dennis's (publishing as Korth, 2007) discussion of empirical and imaginary:

> *The empirical will refer to claims that are dependent on space and time coordinates and are, in principle, accessible to multiple witnesses (Habermas, 1981). I will refer to these empirical claims as the discourse of the real. The imagined will refer to the paradigmatic structures, mental configurations, concepts, inferences, and so on that are not constructed through a one-to-one dependence on space and time coordinates, although the imaginary will make reference to space and time. In other words, the imaginary is not a mere reflection of that we presume to be real. It is something altogether different but related. (Korth, 2007, p. 70)*

Self as a learnable or appropriable construct, if we follow this logic, may best be articulated as at first an intersubjectively idealized, imaginary concept that is referenced or drawn upon to generate self-like thoughts, behaviors, interactions, and so on as opposed to subjectivities constructed through interactions or as an agency-free cultural determinant. There may be less a 'self' to define in a solely individualized sense as much as sociocultural, normative claims or

idealizations regarding the imagined concept of self, and thus the use of self in coordinating and conditioning human interaction points not toward self as a knowable 'thing' for individuals but instead as an intersubjective idealization that is affirmed or troubled by individuals and groups. Thus, it is important in an educational setting where changes to self are intended learning outcomes (e.g., Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997) to explore the normative claims organizing an intersubjective, culturally and historically structured imaginary ideal of self, and the consequences of these claims as carried out in the real.

Self, then, may be placed prior to—yet is always backgrounded in discussions of—identity as a boundary object (Wenger, 1999) between structure and lifeworld in social science, at least within a culture and history prioritizing self (Campbell, 1987). More specifically, self appears an intersubjective and socioculturally organized, ideological concept that then is drawn upon to coordinate not only a sense of one's personhood but also *other* and normalized forms of social interaction. Discussions of self, within this approach, become necessary as a discourse of cultural and structural change toward locating and reorganizing self/other ideologies with the goal of democratic education and participation. This places the discussion of self as an idealized and advanced aspect of curriculum and pedagogy in a central position when addressing the topic of education for democracy, as was the case in this study. It is to this end that I focus the remainder of this paper, by providing vignettes and discussions of the manners in which we can see this occurring in one educational setting.

The Generalized Self and Being Other

Within both the curriculum and pedagogy of the course, self was imagined and referenced as whom I will label the *owner/consumer*. The co-instructors[1] as well as the curriculum they drew from both implicitly and explicitly, although perhaps unintentionally, presented and anticipated interactions generated by this idealized construct. I present a series of vignettes that highlight how the *owner/consumer self* was referenced during the course.

How to Be Nice and Get What You Want

June 16, 2014; 9:57 a.m. The nine students and I sit in a pine grove, in an arc on our sleeping pads, which also double as cushions during lessons; Katherine stands in front of us, leaning over an imagined cooking station as if she is grilling hamburgers at a fast-food restaurant. Dillon walks up with his shoulders pulled forward, and is neshen in his order: *Uh . . . lemmie get a veggie burger with some special sauce . . . and some Hi-C.* Katherine responds *mmhmm* without looking up, and Dillon continues: *and an order of sweet potato fries.*

Katherine says *OK* and mutters quietly while pretending to put together Dillon's order. She turns to face him; he has his hands in his pockets and appears to be mimicking passivity. She reaches out as if handing him a bag and says, *OK, here's your hamburger, and your Hi-C, and your potato fries. That will be ten dollars.* Dillon looks toward Katherine's outstretched hand and the imagined

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1   Pseudonyms are used to provide anonymity throughout the text.
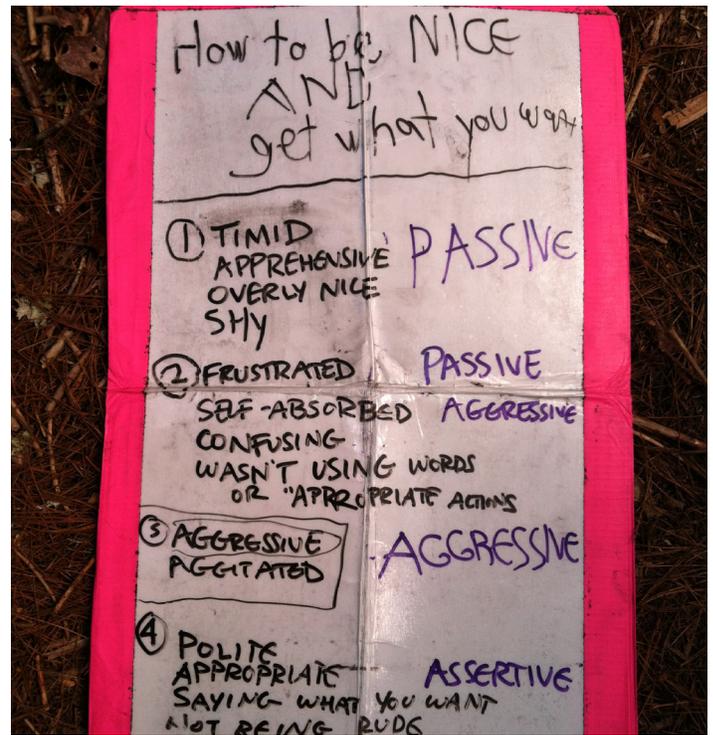
This lesson, we're going to call it . . . How to be nice **and** (emphasis hers) *get what you want. Number one; someone describe Dillon's approach in scene one.* Katherine marks off a *1, 2, 3,* and *4* on the whiteboard, and she and the students work through each, remembering Dillon's communicative acts and what identifying labels could be used to capture his demeanor. The four—passive, passive-aggressive, aggressive, and assertive—were presented, as Dillon explained to me later during an interview, as the *most common interactions between people*, and *ideally what we want to be is assertive—because you're saying what needs to be said, to who it needs to be said, in the correct manner. And you're not inflaming the situation, but at the same time you're getting what you want, OK?*

With communicative assumptions drawn from the assertiveness training fad of the 1970s and early 1980s (e.g., Epstein, 1980; Hull & Schroeder, 1979), students were presented not only with a metaphor of the acting self as a consumer at a fast-food restaurant, but a lesson organizing communication styles into more or less effective tools for achieving the goals of a consuming self. The identity typology of passive, passive-aggressive, aggressive, or assertive offered examples of how the *owner/consumer self* can be organized with various desirable and undesirable consequences. For example, Dillon explained to the students that passivity is *unhealthy because in situations where you're not getting what you want, verbalizing or expressing what you want, um, it's frustrating. You're disempowered. And all of us as human beings, social beings, we all desire power—but there are appropriate ways to seek it out.* Of the four typologies of the *owner/consumer self* that were presented, the first three were deconstructed by uncovering undesirable consequences stemming from each; the passive *owner/consumer*'s attempt was dismissed due to the inability to get what one wants when constructing behaviors aligned with this objectification; passive-aggressive suffered the same fate with the added undesirability of negative acts toward others: *passive-aggressive is similar to*

passive, but demonstrating that aggression because you didn't get what you want—that's negative, because [passive] *is more self-inflicted, and* [passive-aggressive] *is more inflicted on others,* explained Dillon. That is, the situational identity of the *owner/consumer* self is to blame for the inability to obtain what is wanted when organized as passive or passive-aggressive; however, to act out toward others due to one's own failure to get what one wants, as the passive-aggressive *owner/consumer* does, is least desirable.

Dillon's representation of the aggressive *owner/consumer* self was able to obtain his wants, but this was coupled with the undesirable extra of spit in the hamburger, hinting at the potential for repercussions if we do not organize an *owner/consumer* self that can successfully obtain our wants without conjuring animosity in the *other.* The assertive *owner/consumer* self was most desirable because, as explained by Dillon, *when you're assertive, you're self-confident, first of all, and you're aware of yourself, aware of what you want, and you're also respecting other people*. This assertive organization of the *owner/consumer* self simultaneously resulted in Dillon being able to get what he wanted from Katherine while also leaving her feeling as if she had not been harmed (cf. Woolfolk & Dever, 1979); thus, communicating with one another "assertively" became an educational theme for students while on course.

Where self is idealized as *owner/consumer*, it makes rational sense to objectify communication and interactions as goal-oriented; that is, to get what one wants becomes the primary normative goal for interaction, and this becomes the reference point for simultaneously constructing potential acts as well as assessing the value of those acts. Alberti and Emmons (1974) identify assertion as "behavior which enables a person to act in his [sic] own best interest" (p. 2). This is problematic when attempting democratic forms of participation, in which interdependence and the ability to be both empathetic and skeptical of self and other interests is paramount (cf. Leonardo & Porter, 2010). The assertive *owner/consumer*, by being valued for successfully obtaining the exact wants of acting self without intentionally harming other, who is, after all—despite being a means to an end—worth protecting from intentional symbolic or physical violence and oppression, was the ideal self to reference and practice during the course.

Owning Symbolic Positions

Along with approaching social interaction from the perspective of obtaining one's own wants or advocating one's own interests while viewing others as a means to a personal end, the *owner/consumer* self also claimed dominion over symbolic spaces and positions. Assertiveness training was one of four communication lessons whose progression was part of a larger curriculum on how to best address issues of social justice in students' lives; during the final act of this lesson, students participated in a circle-talk (Seaman & Rheingold, 2013), wherein each student responded to a prompted question. Students were asked, *How can you demonstrate assertiveness in your life, in one capacity or another?*, opening up the possibility of addressing the topic of assertiveness and getting what one wants in a variety of manners. One of the most outspoken students in the course, Sarah, offered to respond to the prompt first:

Maybe, if you see somebody that's getting picked on, or somebody's just mistreating somebody else, instead of getting really angry or mad at them, and overdoing it [Researcher comment: because undesirable emotional responses are for passive-aggressive or aggressive owner/consumers], you could approach it with a balanced set of emotions and talk to the person, maybe one-on-one, and say, "I don't like how you did that, I'm not mad at you, but you need to consider how they feel and see if you would want to be treated that way."

Sarah tactfully reorganized the discussion of identity typologies of the *owner/consumer* self into a discussion of potential conflict and injustice, but more important, because this circle-talk did not provide the space for interaction and dialogue, she organized the statement as an open-access, potential *you*, wherein the *I* is implied but others are welcome to pick up or try out the statement as also potentially theirs. This is sometimes referenced as a linguistic shifting (Wortham, 1996)—conscious or not—of various intentions and with various consequences; here, it supports symbolic dialogue where it is otherwise not physically possible. It may be argued that such a strategy obscures self by avoiding I-driven truth-claims due to discomfort with the topic, but I argue this is more appropriately recast as a response to a discomfort with the individuated structure of an interaction, wherein collaborative or collective discourse is being denied. The consequence of implying I and you as simultaneously partial occupants to a knowledge claim appears to lend credence to this being a subtle resistance to the *owner/consumer* self and normative assumption of individual spaces of reason (Brandom, 1985). Within this statement, potential positions are unowned and instead presented as symbolically public and multiple-access, and this makes reference to something like a *contributing self*, wherein shared access and collaboration are normative goals. She was quickly sanctioned.

Hmm. Really quick, could you summarize that, and could you put yourself into the context, by saying "I"? So, "I can demonstrate assertiveness by doing (blank)?" Dillon responded. Sarah looked confused, but then re-stated her previous comment: *So, if I see somebody getting made fun of, then I can approach the person, and talk to them about it appropriately. Nice*, said Dillon, almost inaudible in a whisper. Sarah had now claimed dominion over her symbolic act in such a manner as to tentatively commit to action toward a hypothetical, future other (Brandom, 1985) while simultaneously denying current, relevant others from interacting with her through sharing the dialogic space she had constructed earlier.

The next student responded while using the appropriate I-language, but the following student, María, struggled to negotiate the *owner/consumer* self into her response as well: *I could be more assertive by addressing it so that you can get what you need—um, want—and you've gotta speak up . . .*

Whereas previously Dillon had corrected Sarah's language toward owning her symbolic, potential positions, Katherine built on this idea for María and the rest of the students:

I'm going to back Dillon up on the "I" statements instead of the "you" statements. There's this funny term that we have in our language, which is "you": when "you" do this, when "you" do that; that is this great way

of taking ownership off of ourselves—own it. [Dillon: Word.] Feel the power of saying "I can do this" instead of "I can, and then you can . . ." So I'm going to ask you, like Dillon, to rephrase that while using "I."

María double-checked to see if she needed to start back over from the beginning of her response, and rephrased her statement while referencing self as no longer a contributor to a social process but now as owner of symbolic spaces and intentions: *I can speak up for myself—if I don't get what I actually needed; I can just say it nicely, and get what I want. . . .* To congratulate her appropriation of self and ownership of her statement, both Dillon and Katherine clapped approvingly. *Well said*, responded Dillon, and Katherine further reinforced María's speech act: *That was beautiful, thank you.*

Brandom (1985) described a space of reason as a symbolic, imaginary space wherein actors take stands on knowledge claims while simultaneously justifying the potential validity of those claims; actors lacking the ability to either justify or assent to the commitments of such a claim—such as an infant mimicking speech acts—are thought to be acting outside or on the periphery of the space of reason. I argue the imagined, idealized *owner/consumer* self may be thought of in a similar, referential manner, and this space is both socially organized and policed. Further, peripheral to the privileged space in which self was organized was where alternative selves were referenced, such as Sarah's and María's non-owning speech acts; the co-instructors' choice to reject their acts (and by extension, their situationally constructed identities and referenced selves) exemplified the systemic durability of insulated, ideological commitments to a privileged—even if imaginary—space and inability to recognize or entitle (Brandom, 1976) alternative spaces as also potentially valid or justifiable.

On Being Other: It's Not the Place for Dissent

Discussions of self often assume self to be ubiquitous among individuals, save when distracted or otherwise unobservant of self-in-action (e.g., Mead, 1934). That is, it is assumed that we are all acting and interacting as selves—the self, symbolically and socially negotiated method and product it may be, is the option available to an individual. One is self, surrounded by real or imagined others; each other is in fact self to that specific person who in turn views the former as other. Thus, when discussing *self*, there is an implicit and backgrounded discourse of *other* of importance only because it refers to the I-self acting toward the you-other, and vice-versa with self and other reversed. I found this distinction unable to capture the nuances of self-other interactions in this educational program, primarily due to the assumption that I cannot purposefully organize as and appropriate *other*, and act as I-other in response to an acting you-self; decoupling self from I was necessary to fully grasp the complexity of the self/other pedagogical interactions.

What I mean by this is idealized conceptualizations of self are organized with relation to imagined, idealized others. Synchronous with the *owner/consumer* self is the *submissive service-provider* other. Katherine hinted at this imaginary ideal of other with her metaphoric representation as a fry-cook server to Dillon's customer. The other backgrounded in the discussion of Dillon's self was a service

provider whose job it was to, if communicated with assertively, willingly and submissively provide the self with what it wants.

Are we practicing this [assertive, *owner/consumer* selves] *all alone?* asked Katherine as the communication lesson came to a close. *No*, replied the students and Dillon in unison. *All right,* said Katherine, *what is it going to take to practice it with each other?* Ivan said *group effort*, while Jeffrey said *cooperation*; Katherine had a different idea in mind: *maybe a little bit of tough skin every so often. Hmm,* nodded Dillon, as if in agreement.

So, Katherine offered, one thing you can do, if you notice anyone having passive-aggressive behavior, you might be able to help by saying, "Cool, Katherine, I'm noticing a little bit of passive-aggression, and I just want to help you turn that into assertiveness. Can you try that again?" And if someone asks, "Can I try that again?," that means they are using good course language [she touches her thumb and index finger together in an 'OK' sign], and you can say, "Yeah! I've got a bit of tough skin, and I want to help you learn."

The self is a potential space that can be claimed and acted from, but so also is the other; the *submissive service-provider* other should be willing—should even volunteer—to be subject to repetitions of potentially uncomfortable and/or oppressive interactions so that the self can practice toward the idealized assertive *owner/consumer*. Taking on the role of self or other was situational and contingent on intersubjective cues, such as recognition of a potential *owner/consumer* acting from within a desirable or undesirable identity type.

While going through the circle-talk, self was a roving role during which the student enacting self was meant to address future, hypothetical others. The actual others in this space were, once denied the possibility to symbolically interact with the self's speech acts as these were communicatively 'owned,' left as passive observers waiting for their chance to act while drawing from the referent self. At alternate moments, such as when recognizing a potential self-in-action, students were encouraged to submit and volunteer to *be other* for the acting self. During specific educational settings, however, students were directly instructed to be other for an acting self.

June 18, 2014; 9:38 p.m. The students and instructors were sitting in a circle on a mixture of gravel and grass. Katherine was leading the students through their fourth and final communication lesson of the course: how to give (and receive) feedback.

Ach! shouted a blindfolded Denzel as he put a clove of raw garlic into his mouth, and the observing students laughed while two others—Ivan and Sarah, also blindfolded—nervously and curiously turned the garlic clove that Katherine had placed in their hands. After they had all eaten and described the garlic, she returned with a Skittle candy piece, much to the joy of the three students. Both the bitter (Sarah called it *sharp*) and the sweet now experienced, Katherine and the students decided that both are necessary in life—the former in small amounts to enhance and improve a dish, the latter a wonderful treat but not healthy in excess. *I'm gonna give you a lesson on feedback,* Katherine

continued. *What do you think is the positive feedback and what do you think is the constructive?*

The structure and consequences of feedback in EE systems have been topics that I have explored in greater depth elsewhere (Vernon, 2013); here I wish to only focus on the roles of feedback giver (self) and feedback receiver (other).

First of all, Katherine opined, my theory of feedback is that it's really feed-forward. We're not saying, "Hey, this is what happened this week, and you could have done this instead," but "I noticed this, and you could be more effective in the future if . . . it's a gift (emphasis hers), it's a really cool gift; and give some Skittles, give some Skittles when you give the garlic—sometimes I think of a garlic sandwich, so like "Skittle-garlic-Skittle."

The concept of feedback—or *feed-forward*—is organized here from the giver's perspective; feedback is a communicative act performed by a self toward an other with the goal of initiating a desired behavior change. The articulation of *gift* sets up a metaphor for the potential other—the feedback receiver, who must be the willing *submissive service-provider* other to appropriately accept the gift. Again, Katherine explained:

So, with any gift, sometimes it's a gift that you love, and you think, "Oh my gosh, I could do wonders with that!" But sometimes you get a gift and you're like, "A tenth pair of socks, Grandma! Huh." But you have to try them on, and wiggle your toes around in them. So you're giving gifts to each other, and in the moment your job is to accept it. You can ask a clarifying question if you don't understand it, like "can you try that again?," but it's not the place for dissent. And what we call that is: honest, open, and willing.

The metaphor of a gift from one's grandmother sets up a cultural-normative reference to submissive acceptance out of duty or care; you-other is not meant to disrupt the more valuable action of me-self. Engaging in dissent or questioning would initiate the introduction of an also-self into the interaction, hence the term 'self-defense', but by being other, there is actually no you-self to defend. Katherine then double-checked for understanding: *and when you receive feedback, what do you think you can say?*

Thank you? offered María as a potential response. *Thank you!* responded Katherine, in singsong agreement. Katherine explained other logistical rules for giving feedback, many of which were familiar to the students by this point, as they drew on the same idealizations of self: use I-statements, be specific, etc. After about six minutes to prepare to be a potential giver, the co-instructors and students went around the circle, giving feedback to the person seated on their left. I abstained from participating and so only observed the interactions; each self gave feedback to the other, while the other only—for every student and co-instructor who enacted the role—responded with *thank you* or a close variation (*cool, thank you* was Ivan's response, for example) before switching from other to self and beginning the process anew.

In one of the first research studies I designed, I conducted in-depth interviews with co-instructors to understand the experience of co-teaching in these intense, all-encompassing environments (Vernon, 2011; Vernon & Seaman, 2012); I found reaching back to an interview from this work helped add context to the issue of self and other within the structure of a feedback encounter. As one of these earlier participants from that study had shared:

I think sometimes giving [feedback] helps facilitate getting my needs met . . . for lack of a better word, we usually give corrective feedback to people based on things that are somehow in conflict with our way of doing things, or in conflict with our understanding of the world or the way something should be done. If that's the case, then we're giving feedback almost in hopes that the person will take it and become more like us or more aligned with what we view as the way . . . it's like we say it because we're trying to help people do better, but help do better relative to what, you know? We give feedback so you can improve, but it's like, improve on you meeting my vision of the world (laughs).

I believe this correctly identifies some of the conflict arising from the self/other relationship in which acting selves are encouraged to, as *owner/consumer*, anticipate other as *submissive service-provider*, and further, wherein the *submissive service-provider* other is claimed and performed by individuals in what is literally a self-affirming cycle. In systems where the appropriation of an idealized self and other is structurally mandated, this is even more problematic, as an unreflexive and uncritical adherence to the imaginary, idealized forms of self and other render alternative, emancipatory and socially just representations of self and other as illogical, irrational, or otherwise inaccessible. Further, democratic participation relies on the assumption that individuals are capable of contributing to a social endeavor as an acting self (e.g., Dewey, 1916), but the self/other pedagogy presented here relied on the assumption that educators can and should intentionally manipulate students' referent acts of self and other, thus troubling a basic tenant in pragmatic theories of democracy.

Discussion

Of immediate impact for this particular setting and readers whose educational and scholarly practices resonate with this discussion is the recognition that 'self-discovery' is not that; self-learning was mediated by purposeful instruction on the part of the educators, who were drawing from an organizationally idealized curriculum of self. Students were directed and apprenticed (Rogoff, 1993) toward specific types of self and other, and this implicates commonly held beliefs within this educational community regarding how educational outcomes are achieved. Given the institutional advancements of discovery of and changes to self as anticipatable outcomes for participants (Freeman, 2010), it should not be surprising to see that A-OB curriculum takes an active role in setting the conditions within which students learn to perform approved versions of self and also learn how self is to interact with a society of others. In other words, a mathematics course ties expected learning outcomes directly to curriculum and pedagogy informed by mathematics education discourse; it should be no

surprise that an educational setting steeped in discourses of self takes an active role in deciding what self should be and how students should learn and demonstrate it.

Toward a Post-Mead Theory of Self

As an historical analysis, Michelson's (1999) reasoning that the experiential learner is isolated to inner, cognitive processes (thus disrupting democratic, participatory learning) due to a paranoia of outside influence appears a valid interpretation, particularly given the psychological movement of self during the mid-20th century (e.g., Maslow, 1943). As a contemporary analysis, however, the organization of self in this EE setting was not satisfactorily explained by purely extending Michelson's line of scholarship. What appears more reasonable is that the experiential learner (self) is built in relation with others—here the *owner/ consumer* and *submissive service-provider*. These are, I argue, examples of a reification of capitalist economic theory as relevant for organizing self and other, much as has already happened to relationships (social capital), cultural interplay (cultural capital), justifying the educational system (human capital theory), and many other non-monetary aspects of our social existence. Paranoia of outside influence appeared to be less of a motivation than paranoia of symbolic material loss or missed gain, meaning the progressive movement of experiential education has not outpaced the post-industrial economic influence it once sought to avoid (Dewey, 1916).

In this manner, we can also see that the self (and, we should now realize, the other) is not, contrary to Hahnian logic, necessarily "discovered" or revealed through participation in adventure or other forms of experience (e.g., Simmel, 1965), but is taught, affirmed, and corrected with reference to ideological structures; yet it is also not necessarily instilled by an outside regime in which individuals are devoid of agency. Self is neither inherent nor instilled; we are instead able to consider self/other conceptualizations as sites of struggle for cultural normalization or reconstruction, in which institutions, communities, and individuals labor to make sense of social existence and the symbolic spaces for individuals, and wherein power relations regularly obstruct the democratic potential to collectively and critically examine conceptualizations as such.

Thus, the use of educational settings to practice embodying self and other, while used here to unintentionally advocate a pecuniary, capitalist self serviced by submissive others, thus reaffirming inequality and oppressive, goal-oriented social relations, may also be a setting for challenging social organization toward democratic participation. The symbolic spaces these idealizations occupy are policed and protected, but I argue are potentially penetrable, whether through symbolic violence (Leonardo & Porter, 2010), confusion through variation and play (Michelson, 1999; Vernon, in press), or collective critical inquiry (Kaldec, 2007). In other words, the structure of self-other idealizations functioned to actively mediate the conditions in which individuals were taught to anticipate, recognize, and contribute to the community, making this aspect of the educational setting inseparable from, and thus a necessary addition to, any discussion of experiential learning and its connection with democracy or forms of self-education.

To aid in this discourse and practice, I offer up the methodological and theoretical discussion of self and other as cultural-normative, idealized types in which we no longer necessarily assume self as inseparable from I, but rather locate self and other as situationally and intersubjectively organized places and spaces of interpretable and anticipatable relation, both potentially referenced and acted on by I or you. In other words, I argue self and other are claimable, interdependent interactions with anticipatable enactments (cf. Brandom, 1976). To the extent self has been ubiquitously cast with I points toward its maintenance as a privileged position over other, and explains how both are learned and self is consistently claimed. That it thus becomes the struggle to recognize you as also-self, with undergirds much in democratic movements (e.g., Leonardo & Porter, 2010), further locates self in a privileged position. These intersubjective idealizations are perhaps backgrounded in many forms of communicative interaction, and must be attended to in such a manner as to not establish multiple selves in dialogue but rather to equalize the space between self and other in order to negate the necessity for either, simultaneously affording equal opportunity in both.

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