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# Towards a pedagogy of experiential learning

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Jean Pierre Wilken PhD

[jean-pierre.wilken@hu.nl](mailto:jean-pierre.wilken@hu.nl)

# Learning from experiences



- Learning from studies documenting experiences (e.g. narrative studies, collective experiential knowledge)
- Learning from experiences of other people by listening to stories
- Learning from own experiences (past and present): experiential learning



**Developing experiential knowledge**

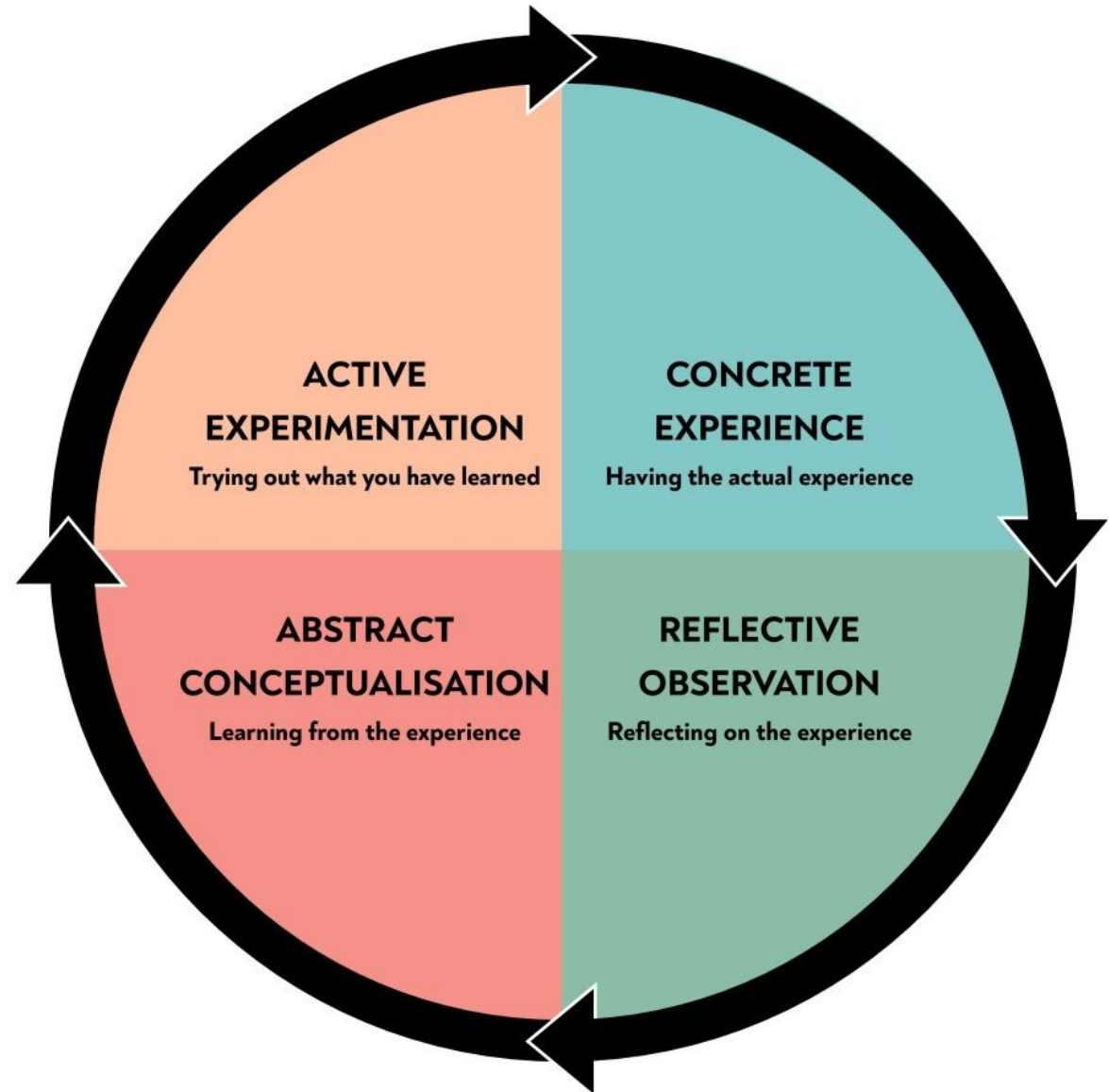


## The well-known learning cycle of David Kolb (1984)

Learning from *direct* experiences

No focus on *past or lived* experiences

We have to go beyond this model....



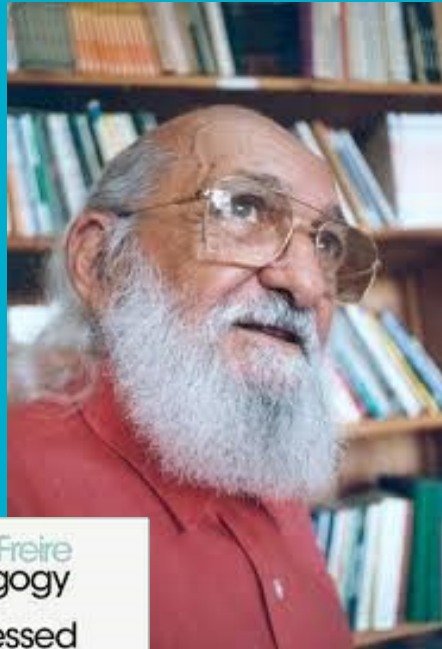


**To make learning experiential, several elements should be present, such as**

- **a goal that is personally meaningful to the student**
- **personal engagement**
- **involvement of the whole person in the learning experience (including his senses, emotions, and personality).**

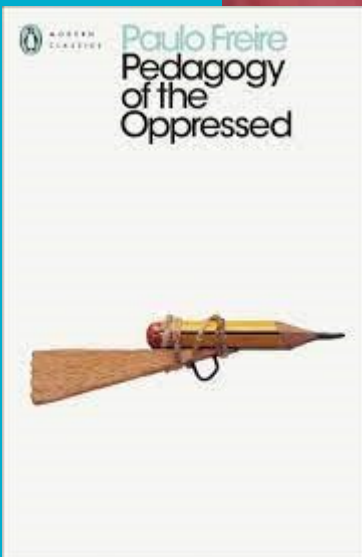
Lee Andresen, David Boud and Ruth Cohen (1995)

# Paolo Freire's critical pedagogy

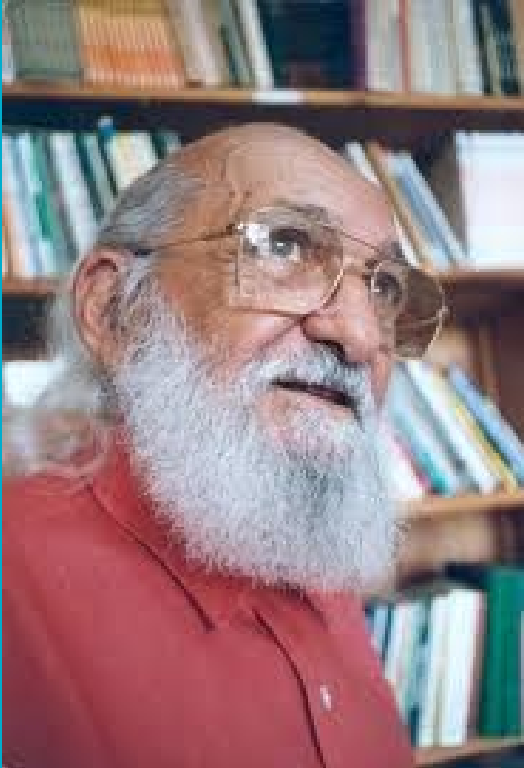


“Human existence... can only be nourished... by real words with which people change the world. Human existence means naming the world, changing it. Once the world has a name, it presents itself again to the namers as a problem and demands a new naming from them. People do not grow in silence, but in words, in work, in action-reflection...

Dialogue is the encounter between people, through the mediation of the world, to name the world” (Freire, 1968, p. 72-73)



# Paolo Freire



Freire proposed a dialogical approach in which students become “active agents” in their own education, using their own experiences and reflections.

He places the experiences of people at the centre.

He feels a special obligation to focus on, capture, report, and, therefore, honour the views of marginalized people.

e.g.: parent advocacy movement in New York;  
vulnerable children in Malmö

# Engagement



- **What difference do you want to make?**
- **Do you need others?**
- **What are you uncertain about?**



**“Experiential learning is learning in relation to others  
and the world”**

**Bartels (2023)**







## (Creating) social spaces as places of learning

- Social learning
- Dialogue
- Space



# Creating dialogical space

- Dialogical space describes the area between voices in dialogue, in which participants share their points of view and are searching for each other's shared or different perspectives (Wegerif, 2007, 2013)
- Dialogical space is a space of possibilities, in which novel, shared meanings and ideas can develop.
- Characteristics
  - Basic conditions: safety, trust
  - No judging, equality, listening
  - Suitable ways of expression
  - Creative tension

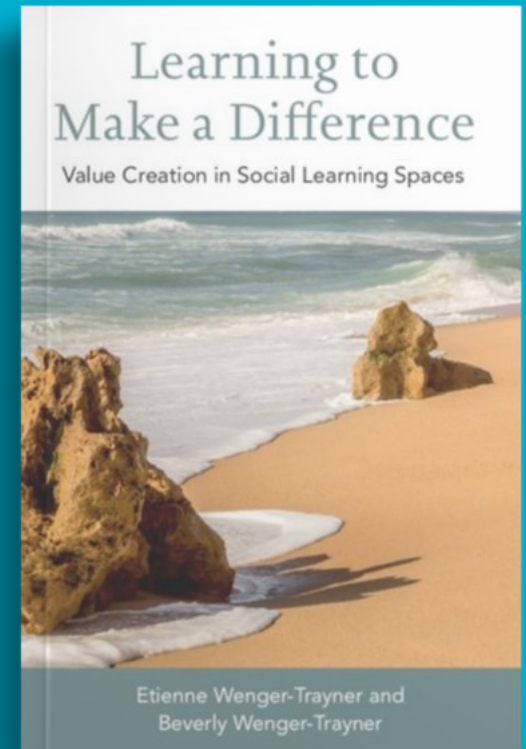
# Wenger's Social Learning Space

**A social learning space is an experience of connection that arises when people want to learn to make a difference**

**Social: social relationships determine the space, so the quality of social relationships is important**

**Learning: interactions are driven by a desire to discover together**

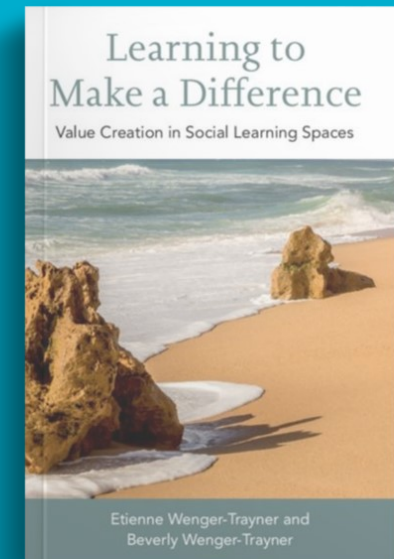
**Space: the psychological space that participants experience to learn in reciprocity.**



# Elements of a social learning space



- **Wanting to make a difference ('caring to make a difference')**
- **Working from uncertainty ('engaging uncertainty') - not knowing.**
- **There is not one truth or solution**
- **Creates productive tension**
- **Attention ('paying attention')**
- **Attention to everyone's story, experience, input, reactions, emotions**

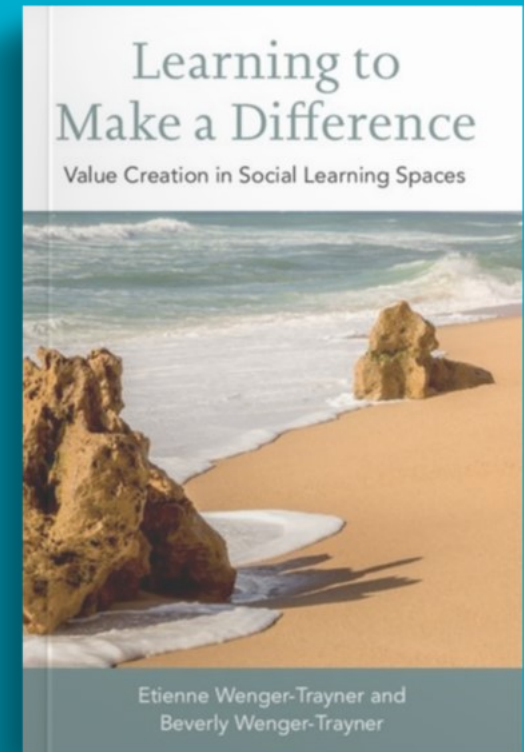


# Challenges



## Three challenges

- **Get a grip on the difference you want to make**
- **Revealing uncertainty to make it shareable**
- **Commitment to paying attention in order to discover new things**



# Jan Maschelein's critical pedagogy

## Experiential Learning as a journey

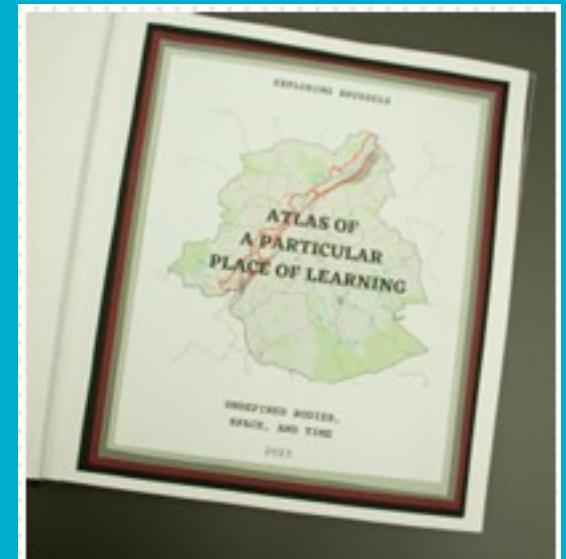
- a journey to explore, not to verify or to explain
- does not have to be comfortable
- not navigating (intentional) but wandering (attentional)
- thoughtful and adventurous

Requires a specific pedagogical climate  
Meeting between different worlds



# Jan Maschelein's critical pedagogy

- Learning outcomes are not pre-decided
- The world as stage (not only the school)
- Place, space and time
- Educational space as a social space
  - A conversational space
  - A dialogical space
  - Doing justice to the other (a form of 'care')
  - A cognitive *and* affective affair
  - Arranging creative encounters



**Exposure: to dare to surrender yourself to experiences**

**Maybe not recognizing what you experience**

**Attentiveness = an active verb**

**Demands to shift something (language, meanings) =  
transformation**

**The importance of the undecided, the undefinable**

**Suspending judgments**

*Compare Andries Baart's Theory of presence (2001)*



# Jan Maschelein's critical pedagogy

**The attitude of the teacher, student, researcher.....**

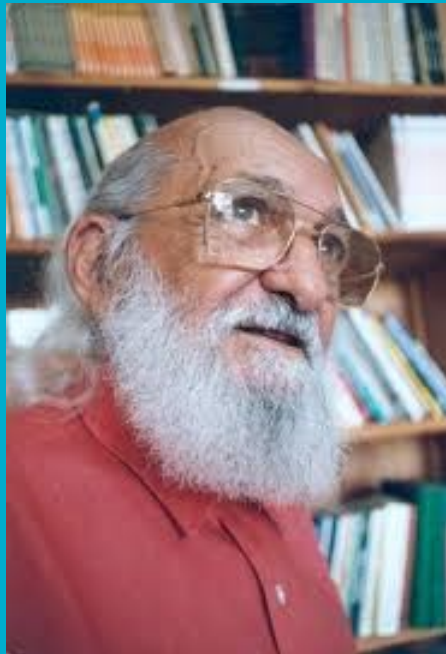
- be open**
- embrace diversity**
- take risks; no control sharpens your mind**
- accept the 'not knowing'**
- accept and welcome experiences as they come**
- pay attention to the quality of the process (time)**

# Jan Maschelein's critical pedagogy

## Sharing experiences to learn

- **Collective work**
- **Developing sensitivity for what matters**
- **Explore words, notions**
- **Not needed to create logic**
- **Explaining is not needed**
- **Look for what is enriching**

# To conclude: Paolo Freire again....



*Based on Patton, 2017*

## Some pedagogical principles

- \* Use evaluative thinking to open up, develop, and nurture critical consciousness
- \* Critical pedagogy must be interactive and dialogical
- \* Integrate reflection and action
- \* Value and integrate the objective and subjective
- \* Integrate thinking and emotion
- \* Critical pedagogy is co-intentional education among those involved in whatever roles

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