It is now an axiom that America’s education system is broken. This emerging common sense has proliferated a national movement populated by policy wonks, venture philanthropists, entrepreneurs, and corporate players who, along with, and more commonly in opposition to educators, students, parents, and concerned citizens, proffer a wide range of solutions to the manufactured crises. It would appear that there is nearly a consensus that these crises are profound (see Ravitch 2013 for the counter argument). The questions debated in the popular media and in educational literature have largely focused on what kinds of interventions are needed.

David Thornton Moore’s Engaged Learning in the Academy: Challenges and Possibilities offers us a framework for thinking about the challenges we face as engaged teachers and scholars in a rapidly changing academy as well as nuanced arguments for why such teaching and learning is integral to the liberal arts mission of higher education. This is the second book in the series, Community Engagement in Higher Education, edited by Dan Butin. In the preface to this volume, Butin refers to the current moment as one in which “higher education is splintering before our eyes.” He notes:

The prominence of for-profit institutions has forced us to redefine the notion of “education for the public good”; online education has upended the very idea of place-based learning; competency-based learning and prior learning assessments have begun to explode the monopoly of the credit hour as the basis for the credentialing function of the academy. This disruptive moment suggests…a unique opportunity (to ask)…What is it that I offer to my students that cannot be outsourced or automated?” (p. ix)

For Butin, education should be transformational and he aims for a classroom fostering the development of knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that will open the minds and hearts of his students to new ways of exploring and understanding the world around them (p. ix) and that will lead them to act within it in ways that support a vibrant democracy with a well developed public sphere (Butin, 2010). It is clear that Butin has very different ideas about the purpose of education and the role of the teacher than the majority of neoliberal education reformers.

A recent report by the Center for American Progress (2013) prescribes technology-enabled alternatives as part of post-secondary education reform. They recommend that this should include competency-based programs that allow students to advance at their own pace by demonstrating academic achievement and creating a shorter vocational path to workplace readiness. They note that this will require substantial organizational changes at postsecondary institutions with entirely new roles for administrators and faculty (O’Neil, 2014), and we could read this as suggesting a more standardized and vocationally-oriented curriculum based on fewer formal classes with less direct contact with instructors, more computer-based instruction, and more standardized testing (Nelson, 2013). A version of technology-based instruction and evaluation, governed primarily by large corporate interests like Pearson Education, is already a characteristic of the Common Core State Standards, (CCSS) now adopted by 45 states to govern k-12 education (see Ravitch, 2013; Karp 2014). The Common Core embodies a sensibility that implies that curriculum is too important to be entrusted to faculty. Indeed, under some visions of Common Core, the faculty role will become one of largely supervising computer-based instruction and testing. The advances of Common Core in k-12 foreshadow what is coming to public higher education.
as the Center for American Progress report reveals. Such new roles for faculty are manifest, for example, in the new competency-based Associates Degree program at the College for America at Southern New Hampshire University (http://collegeforamerica.org/), where faculty roles have been radically redefined—largely as supervisors of on-line and self-directed activity-based learning. At The Center for Engaged Democracy’s 2013 Summer Institute on The Future of Community Engagement (http://www.merrimack.edu/live/files/572-ced-revised-agenda62513pdf), Dan Butin challenged the participants to consider whether there will be any room inside our institutions for engaged teaching and learning in the era of MOOCs, distance learning, high-stakes testing, competency-based curricula, and revenue-driven imperatives that demand “labor efficiencies.” In an academy that is being rapidly reshaped to conform to a neoliberal agenda (Giroux, 2012, 2013) what kind of engagement will be possible and what are the implications for civic education?

Into this morass comes Moore’s new book. Moore doesn’t answer these questions for us, but he gives us a framework for talking about the challenges to engaged teaching and learning and for constructing some answers, first by mapping out the enterprise of experiential learning and then by placing it in the context of the changing academy. He asks: What happens when students learn by doing? And in answering that question we are inevitably led to ask many others including the greater question of what is education for? While this is a slim volume, it is packed with insights, questions, and tools. Anyone who has practiced engaged pedagogy or who is considering doing so will benefit from reading this book and will be motivated to talk about it with colleagues.

The book offers an understated argument—understated in the sense that Moore tries to not take a position of advocacy. Hence, I do not think that this would be the document I would present to my provost to make the case for expanding our civic engagement programs. Moore’s intent is to give us the tools, the vocabulary, the conceptual scaffolding to make that case. And in doing so, he makes his own, soft-spoken case for why experiential education, done well, is essential to the university’s mission, if one envisions the university as the document I would present to my provost to make the case for expanding our civic engagement programs. Moore’s intent is to give us the tools, the vocabulary, the conceptual scaffolding to make that case. And in doing so, he makes his own, soft-spoken case for why experiential education, done well, is essential to the university’s mission, if one envisions

But Moore is well positioned to make a case for experiential education. He is an educational anthropologist who has spent more than 30 years studying how people learn outside of classrooms. He teaches in the Gallatin School of Individualized Study at New York University (NYU) where cross-disciplinary, engaged, exploratory learning is promoted and students participate actively in designing their own course of study. The book incorporates Moore’s experiences as an internship director, supervisor, and instructor at NYU as well as findings from three ethnographic projects that explored how and what students learned during their internships.

Moore casts his net widely, aggregating internships and co-ops with community service, service-learning, and community-based learning (but not study abroad) to underscore commonalities to learning from experience. He acknowledges that most of his findings are based on work-based internships. When he speaks of student learners in the volume he refers to them as interns. The benefits of this aggregating are apparent when Moore discusses the cognitive processes associated with learning by doing and when he offers a common vocabulary for talking about what students learn. But at times this feels like an overreach, and Moore needs to remind us that he is speaking primarily about work-based internships. Yet, just when these broad strokes begin to get frustrating for the civic engagement practitioner, Moore will point to a way that service-learning and civic engagement contrast with internships and indeed have the potential to complement and enrich internship practice.

Ironically, while Moore casts the net of engagement widely to cover a range of experiential learning forms, his definition of engagement—essentially learning by doing outside of the classroom—felt confining to me as it excludes forms that some of us in service-learning regard as central to our practice and which are not common in internships. These include engaged or relational pedagogies in which students develop a close working relationship to each other and to their instructors, and in which students, faculty, and community partners engage each other as whole human beings with complex subjectivities. Such engaged teaching may include learning communities, co-teaching, and dialogically-based classes (hooks 1994; Rendon, 2009; Zlotkowski, Longo, &...
Williams, 2006). And for many of us in service-learning, engagement means a strong, equitable, reciprocal collaboration with our community partners (Mitchell 2008; Morton, 1996, 2012; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2012), and as a result, our pedagogy and our practice emphasizes relational work.

The book begins with a consideration of what Moore calls the paradox of experiential learning. In American higher education it has been a truism since the 70’s that experience matters. So why, in spite of impressive growth in the number and kind of experiential programs and national organizations supporting them, such as the National Society for Experiential Education and Campus Compact, does the work still occupy such a marginal place in the academy and why is it so widely devalued? Moore suggests that this paradox reveals fundamental tensions in the university with respect to what it is and does, about the relationship between the academy and the rest of society, about the roles of teachers, and about what constitutes legitimate forms of knowledge and learning. Indeed, these are some of the same tensions manifest in neoliberal education reform—a point Moore makes at the very end of the book.

In exploring this paradox, Moore poses a series of other questions: How does academic knowledge differ from experiential knowledge (epistemological questions)? What do students engaging in experiential learning learn, how do they learn, and how does either kind of knowledge get translated into practical action (curricular and pedagogical questions)? And what is the proper role of the University in all of this—in terms of the kinds of knowledge it generates, values, and disseminates, and in terms of its role in society and the communities it inhabits (institutional questions)? From these grand tour questions, Moore derives related questions—for example—what should the curriculum look like, what are the ethics involved in working outside of the classroom, what are the appropriate roles for instructors and students, what is the proper relationship between instructor and student, how can learning in the field be effectively imported into the classroom, what facilitates transferability of knowledge from the site of learning to application in other contexts and vice versa.? Much of the book is devoted to framing these questions as a series of challenges and opportunities facing experiential educators and indeed the academy.

These explorations are illustrated by following three student interns—one working in a state history museum, one at an enforcement division of a federal agency, and one at a fashion magazine, as well as a civic engagement class involved in a participatory action research project on urban gentrification—and by contrasting their respective experiences. The examples remind us of the unique contributions of ethnography for chronicling the lived experiences of college students and also reminds us that we need to understand these experiences in their richness and diversity and that they often cannot be reduced to summary statistics (Polin & Keene, 2012). The examples are numerous but not expansive and I found myself longing for richer ethnographic description of what the students were doing and more importantly how they understood their own experiences. These important examples would have been enhanced by including the voices of students, their instructors, and their supervisors, which, unfortunately, are not included.

What do we need to think about if we want to answer the multitude of questions posed above? Most of the book is a map and a vocabulary for doing this, giving us a review of how experiential learning has been theorized historically and then a set of conceptual tools for thinking about the curriculum of experience (what students learn) and the pedagogy of experience (how students learn). Moore then contrasts experiential with academic learning, and then returns to consider his foundational questions of why experiential learning is marginalized within the academy and whether it belongs there. Each of the elements in his map poses its own set of challenges. For example, in his discussion of the pedagogy of experience, Moore asks as to consider an array of issues associated with internships. He notes for example, that perhaps the most basic unit of learning on the part of the intern is the mastery of specific tasks. He gives us a framework for thinking about what the intern does—a task analysis—broken down into phases in which the intern becomes established on site, accomplishes the task, processes the learning, and eventually transfers the knowledge by applying it to other contexts. Moore outlines what happens in each phase and then goes on to show how consideration of each poses its own questions and challenges. For example, how does the task being mastered lead the student to pose questions about context? To illustrate, how does the history intern learning to tell a particular story to tour groups come to see that story as part of the larger educational project of the museum, to history in general, to how history gets written, to how history is used to promote certain understandings of the world, and to the impact of historical education on those who use the museum? This in turn raises questions about workplace culture. It poses questions about whether site supervisors are taking a pedagogical stance in their work with interns and if so, what that stance is and whether their own pedagogy is in any way coordinated with what is happening back at school? It raises questions about time on site and relationships with co-workers and of course it raises questions about reflection, outcomes, and

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assessment—all of which are discussed in turn.

Moore concludes that the curriculum of experience is not amenable to standardization or to standardized outcomes—what and how students learn is contingent on particulars—actors, outcomes, activities, intentions, environments, styles, contexts, and personalities. All shape the learning, and hence we cannot say in advance of any particular experience what the student will learn. Such a conclusion will be unsatisfying for those in the standards and accountability movement who promote a standardized curriculum and an audit culture that requires that we speak in terms of replicable and comparable outcomes. And, as Moore points out, this contingency of outcomes entails a certain messiness that can prove frustrating to both instructor and student who may be conditioned to expect to deliver or receive a concrete “product” on a predictable schedule. So, resistance to this kind of learning may come not just from educational reformers and our “academically-oriented” colleagues but from our students as well.

To the fundamental question of whether experiential learning belongs in the university, Moore’s answer again is, it depends—in this case, whether it is done well and deeply, which he suggests is often not the case. The book reminds me of the program that Mitchell (2008) outlines for critical service-learning, offering a critique of prevailing practice and arguing convincingly that work not directed at changing the world for the better is itself part of the problem, and then offering a map of what that work ought to look like. Moore does this, though less forcefully, for internships. But he is reluctant to prescribe what the student will learn. Such a conclusion will be unsatisfying for those in the standards and accountability movement who promote a standardized curriculum and an audit culture that requires that we speak in terms of replicable and comparable outcomes. And, as Moore points out, this contingency of outcomes entails a certain messiness that can prove frustrating to both instructor and student who may be conditioned to expect to deliver or receive a concrete “product” on a predictable schedule. So, resistance to this kind of learning may come not just from educational reformers and our “academically-oriented” colleagues but from our students as well.

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serious, effective engaged learning takes careful planning and substantial resources. It takes professors who understand the complexities of this approach and have developed facility in the necessary teaching practices. It takes time and effort on the part of the students, who may initially prefer only to do the job so they can get the job and may resist the deeper reflection required. And it demands an administration willing to reconstitute the institution’s relations to the larger community, to convince faculty of the legitimacy of experiential knowledge, and to accommodate the organizational reconfiguration that the practice may entail. Making...(this) model dominant in higher education—indeed in any one university—will certainly be difficult but I believe this is where the institution should try to head. (p. 204)

In the end, he calls for us to work together to establish a secure place for this kind of learning, asserting that education needs to be more than a training ground for the nation’s dominant social and economic institutions. This volume offers us a counter-discourse to the one that lauds impersonal, programmed instruction as the desirable and inevitable future and an education that efficiently and economically produces quiescent workers.

This leads us to Moore’s other foundational question—why is the work so marginal within the academy? For Moore this is partly due to a cultural tradition of prioritizing academic knowledge over experiential knowledge and of the theoretical over the
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applied. Moore devotes an entire chapter to examining this distinction that is perhaps more salient for internships than for service-learning courses where class work and community work are highly integrated. The book may help us to engage those who believe that real learning only happens in a classroom. It certainly provides a template for the discussion. The marginalization of certain kinds of experience is also a concomitant of the devaluation of liberal arts education within the neoliberal university. Moore recognizes this and while throughout the book he endeavors to offer an apolitical framework for analyzing experiential learning, he packs a concise but pointed political analysis into the final pages, finally revealing his own positions and implicating neoliberal educational sensibilities as a challenge to engagement and liberal education. He concludes:

Just as the open-source libertarian early days of the internet were quickly overtaken by the monetization of all manner of electronic media, the university has become a tool of moneys interests, and itself has come to operate in many ways as a major corporate enterprise. If that be the case, the move toward reconstituting the academy as a site for public-sphere interconnectivity for critical discourse… may provoke substantial resistance. But that movement is an exciting vision of the future of engaged learning. (p. 198)

Moore sees the potential for coopting work-based internships within the vocational imperatives being promoted by reformers. But he rejects

those neoliberal conceptions of experiential education, whether coops, work-related internships, or traditional community service… (that) devolve into mere training and… do not get to the root of things, at the underlying social, political, and cultural dynamics within which experience occurs and knowledge is produced and used. (p. 202)

And to which I would add, do not foster critical thinking or agency.

This leaves us much to consider. What kind of political program or political engagement is necessary to meet the prodigious challenges posed by a rapidly neoliberalizing academy? For Butin (2010) the answer is to gain legitimacy on the academy’s terms—to become a formally recognized discipline, and to capture and hold ground by establishing departments of civic engagement. Moore sees this as a defensive strategy, challenging Stanley Fish (2008), who argues that a narrow focus on discipline-based inquiry will protect the academy from incursions from the wider society. This position, of course, fails to consider the ongoing and rapid corporatization and monetization of the academy and the transformations they have effected (Giroux, 2012, 2013). And so Moore comes to the opposite conclusion, advocating for “experience across the curriculum.” Following Schneider (2005), he frames the challenge as one of “changing the practice of undergraduate education so that civic engagement becomes central rather than elective,” perhaps analogous to the way that writing across the curriculum has been implemented on many campuses. Of course, realizing such a vision requires reversing current trends in higher education reform.

Experience matters. Teachers matter. It is unlikely that any of what Moore has shown us about experiential learning can be automated or mass-produced in a meaningful way. Different kinds of curricula and different pedagogies have consequences for the kind of society we will live in. Democracy and corporate hegemony are not compatible. The challenges we face as educators, and as citizens in a democratic society are profound, immediate, and of course political, and they require a political analysis and collective action. Like Saltmarsh and Hartley (2011; see also Burkhardt & Joslin, 2012), Moore envisions a necessary movement in which engaged teaching and learning are the driving force for transforming not just our students but the academy and society as well.

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Author

ARTHUR S. KEENE (keene@anthro.umass.edu) is emeritus professor of Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. During his 34 years at UMass he worked as an internship coordinator and service-learning coordinator. He also founded and directed two academic, service-based leadership programs. His most recent ethnographic project, The Ethnography of Us: How Millennials Learn, enlisted teams of student ethnographers to explore the culture of undergraduate learning at UMass. He is currently a member of a research team engaged in a comparative longitudinal study of student outcomes for the UMass Citizen Scholars Program and for similar programs at Stanford University and Providence College.