

International Perspectives on Informal Education

Education xxx, American Civilization xxx

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Course aim: Around the world, people are most influenced by what they have learned informally. While all state systems offer formal schooling, they depend to varying extents on ways of learning that go beyond direct instruction or design. Informal learning is guided by emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs. These needs lead humans to draw upon sensory resources, such as vision and imitation, along with language and other communicational skills. The most common forms of informal learning come through play and leisure, voluntary or self-chosen goals, apprenticeship with scaffolded experience, and community collaboratives. Many of these forms gain organizational structures in community groups, volunteer entities, and support entities centered in special interests. In economically advanced nations, curiosity, passion, and a need for fulfillment and exploration drive informal learning. In contrast, in developing nations, child labor, subsistence needs, and exclusion from formal schooling drive informal learning. Political, economic, and social forces shape the valuing, conditions, and options that surround informal learning.

Objectives: Students taking this course will gain information that will help them see their formal education system comparatively and gain insight into the contexts that determine the relative value of formal and informal education across nations. Students will consider the role of play (including children's literature and storytelling), leisure, arts, and sciences across societies. They will get to know forms of apprenticeship and recognize and analyze ways that museums, aquariums, zoos, and organizational collaboratives. Examples of the latter range from Doctors without Borders to farming collaboratives, non-profit drug companies, educational tutoring services, and community groups devoted to political and social change. Disciplinary perspectives will be primarily those of anthropology, linguistics, and organizational sociology.

Core concepts: play; arts and sciences; literary arts; scaffolding in apprenticeship; museums and other public learning sites; social entrepreneurship; cross-generational learning; agency; legitimate peripheral participation; embodiment; role and stance; envisionment; collaborative learning; distributed cognition; pathways of learning; deliberative democracy; nonformal, informal, and formal education; participatory development.

Course Schedule:

Week 1. Introduction of course; collection from class of contexts and instances of informal learning—its goals, means, and situations
Read for next week's class Lave & Wenger, *Pesepolis I*; Falk & Dierking, 2000. and two cases from packet.

Weeks 2 & 3: Legitimate peripheral participation; apprenticeship and scaffolding; participatory development: economic and political contexts
Read for next week's class four cases from packet. Complete Falk & Dierking and read also first one-third of Daiute *et al.*

Weeks 4 & 5: Distributed cognition and individual learning—myth or mix?
Related concepts: embodiment, envisionment, and pathways of learning
Read for next week's class first half of Maira & Soep; complete Daiute *et al.*

Weeks 6 & 7: Visual learning—efficient and effective
Read for next week's class second half of Maira & Soep plus one Latin American and European graphic novel.

Weeks 8 & 9: Language for creativity, distribution, and permanence
Read for next week's class Smit.

Weeks 10 & 11: Continuity, connection, and memory
For next week, complete case book packet.

Weeks 12 & 13: Review and round-up from research projects

Assignments:

- 1) **10 points, due week 2: two-page application of ideas from Lave & Wenger to student's own learning**
- 2) **20 points, due week 4: four-page appraisal of informal learning and youth violence or youth in community development**
- 3) **10 points, due week 5: glossary of technical terms and concepts related to informal learning**
- 4) **20 points, due throughout the course: oral participation and class leadership**
- 5) **20 points, due week 6: six-page research proposal outline for study of one or more informal learning sites internationally**

6) 20 points, due week 9: four-page plan of arts representation related to one or more concepts in informal education

Criteria for evaluating each assignment: a) adherence to distributed goal and genre description and norms for writing; b) adherence to requirement to reference course discussion and readings; c) adherence to norms for writing that reflects clarity, brevity, precision, and careful editing; d) display of insight into problems and their contexts along with imaginative thinking about the role of informal learning historically and currently (25% credit for each of these criteria).

Textbooks:

Daiute, Colette, *et al.* 2006. *International perspectives on youth conflict and development*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Falk, J. H. & Dierking, L. D. (2000). *Lessons without limit: How free-choice learning is transforming education*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

Lave, Jean & Wenger, Etienne. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Maira, Sunaina & Soep, Elisabeth. 2005. *Youthscapes: The popular, the national, the global*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Smit, Tim. 2001. *Eden*. London: Corgi Books.

Persepolis 1 and 2, plus a collection of European, African, and Latin American graphic novels.

Tepper, Steven J. & Bill Ivey, eds. 2008. *Engaging Art: The next great transformation of America's cultural life*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Casebook packet on informal learning in international contexts.