Paragogy
by Joseph Corneli and Charles Jeffrey Danoff

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Paragogy

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What is it about learning how to make your skateboard float in the air for a split second that will motivate a teenager to invest hours of their time studying the mechanics of the trick, not to even mention the physical pain that comes with failure? Especially if that same student could not pay attention for more than 2 minutes at a time during Chemistry and spends less time than that trying their homework before giving-up?
We have five principles, with which we endeavor to both describe the phenomenon of effective peer learning, and to prescribe key aspects of its best practice. These principles were conceived by turning Knowles principles of andragogy by 90 degrees. In other words, we are looking at learning scenarios in which standard pedagogical (or andragogical) assumptions don’t apply in a straightforward way. This typically includes learning in peer production environments, like the learning that takes place on mailing lists devoted to free software.

("Paragogy" means "production" in Greek.)
In paragogy, we recognize that we are not merely teachers or learners, but are actually co-creating the learning context as a whole. The central role of environment is not unfamiliar in constructivist thinking about education[1] (p. 4):

Thinking of instruction as an environment gives emphasis to the 'place' or 'space' where learning occurs. At a minimum, a learning environment contains: (1) the learner; (2) a 'setting' or a 'space' wherein the learner acts, using tools and devices, collecting and interpreting information, interacting perhaps with others, etc. Again, in the paragogical view, the environment should not be taken as "given" but should instead be viewed as co-created by peers.

The surfer may be comfortable at a certain level of h2o force "context center", but (it isn’t necessary to have tried surfing [as I have, failing badly] to get this metaphor, btw) the center is always changing, or its "decentered". Too much and either peer can fail: surfer falling or board snapping. Too little and there won’t be enough energy for the surfer to stand up. If conditions are apropos and the surfer/board combo can handle the changing context as a decentered center, i.e. the constantly shifting state of the water, surfing can be done. If more surfer/board combos, or peers, join then the possibilities for surfing or learning and a given beach increase exponentially. Consider all the art being made at Waikiki beach in Honolulu on an ideal spring morning.
PARAGOGY PRINCIPLE 2 META-LEARNING AS A FONT OF KNOWLEDGE.

If you put a blade to my throat, I’d say now "They learn by doing. First there’s the 'baptism by fire' where awareness of how far away they are from their goal comes, if they have the social tools to survive that, then they have to endure the monotony of repeating the process over and over until the goal is realized. Even a shared journey of 10,000 miles begins with single steps." Going back to the study group from the first principle, we learned by doing: we had the study group to do well on the test. We survived the 'baptism' with distractions being: not showing up at the library at all, spending the time gossiping about college hook-ups, drinking, studying for another class, etc. We managed to keep our attention on the task at hand: appropriately prepping for tomorrow’s test. We endured the monotony of studying for multiple hours, and then the goal was realized.
Here we are concerned both with efforts to "learn how to learn", and efforts to learn how to support others in their learning efforts[1]. Further, while it is a good idea for any organization to learn its business well[2], learning about learning is especially vital for those in the learning business. In peer learning, that is all of us.


This principle is fairly self-explanatory. Whatever learning you are undertaking, if you do it with peers you will get critiques, and if you learn alone you will not. Continuing on with my study group example, if I had been studying alone and then read my notes that said the pleasure region of the brain’s scientific nomenclature is "the fun zone", I may have just trusted that and moved on. Even if my notes were incorrect, without a peer to provide feedback its likely I would have accepted that as the correct nomenclature. Studying with peers I might have told one of them that area of the brain is the fun zone, and then they could’ve corrected my mistake.
Peers provide feedback that wouldn’t be there otherwise. Learners must not simply seek confirmation of what they already know, they must confront and make sense of difference as part of the learning experience. Differences pose challenges but these are worth grappling with. Firstly, for psychological reasons: in many domains feedback is only available from peers (but of course peer learning can be relevant in domains like rock climbing and computer programming, where automatic feedback does exist). Secondly, there are philosophical or political reasons to affirm difference. In a space like P2PU, which aims to provide "learning for everyone, by everyone, about almost anything", we can hardly avoid developing an "understanding of social relations without domination in which persons live together in relations of mediation among strangers"[1].

Consider learning how to play ice hockey. At the beginning its pretty linear, you learn how to skate and handle the puck with your stick. After that? Maybe then you focus all your energy on getting a fantastic shot you could place anywhere you want in the net. Fairly linear, right? But then, it turns out you are too slow to ever get an opportunity to shoot, so you have to go back and learn the finer points about exactly where to put pressure on your blade as you skate for maximum efficiency and speed. Then you get a new coach who gets mad at you for only playing on the offensive end of the ice and not trying in the defensive zone, so you have to learn the proper way to backcheck and cover your opponent the entire length of the ice. At the end of it all, you may be a complete forward able to score and defend, but you didn’t get there in a straight line and the learning was distributed over time.
Learning does not go in a straight line[1]. In particular, involvement in co-creating the learning context becomes an important "strand" in the paragological understanding of peer learning.

Dealing with success is seemingly easy. You got what you wanted, why aren’t you happy? Ironically, dealing with success can be as difficult as the work getting to that success. Its easy to rest on your laurels, content with yourself and the accolades you may be receiving from others for your accomplishments. Maybe even you take some time off to congratulate yourself and enjoy. But, you know inside that its not over. Reaching a higher peak only lets you see farther, not that the travel is over. You need to "wake up" and realize there is still far more to learn! Wake up and approach your next journey laden with the same hunger that got you to where you are. I am still figuring this part out myself, but I think "wake up" is definitely the best term. I think it involves the fact that I need to wake up and realize despite my success there is more to do and its still as boring as it was before I was successful. Maybe its even harder now that I know the goal isn’t as sexy as I thought it was before?
Without clear goals, there will be nothing to realize. Without critical thinking about goals (leading us to change them), learning is a mostly passive game. Paragogy calls for a strategy of "deliberate practice"[1].

Wake up Egypt!
X: I am trying to get back in [insert name of peer learning project here]. Finding that the courses are less well organised on the web site now

Y: Hm, I haven’t done a whole lot there lately.

X: By this, it isn’t so clear when courses start. etc They used to be done to a set pattern

Y: I think many of them do not "start" or "end" Which I personally think is likely to be a bad idea But also, confusing, when some DO have start and end dates but these aren’t clear I can see why you’re finding it tedious! I think (maybe this is per usual), the only thing to do is to ask a well-framed question in the mailing list!

X: You are prob right. But I find the mailing list a bit daunting It feels to me like quite a close knit group and I am not part of it
I’m imagining what it might be like to start a paragogical charter school or even a model for learning like the International Baccalaureate. It would have been pretty different from my high school, though my home state did have a nice feature whereby students with a "B" average or better could take courses for free at local colleges and universities, up to full time. So for my junior and senior years of high school I got to take pretty much whatever I wanted to take, because I wasn’t in a degree program. In a way this sort of spoiled me for disciplined work -- but that didn’t matter because by the time I was ready to "go away to college", I mostly wanted to study mathematics courses anyway, so I got something resembling discipline for free.
I’m not sure if I have a specific mental block about Drupal programming or what, but at present it is certainly feels like one of my major Achilles heels. David Allen’s comment that "You can do anything, but you can’t do everything" feels like something I’d like to apply to Drupal: use my strengths at writing and conceptualizing projects to apply for grants so I can get money so I can hire someone who’s good at this stuff. I’d particularly like to invest in a programmer who would not only do work on the project, but teach me and other people on the team.
In the Milieu project, motivation to participate could be "just for fun" (like writing reviews on Amazon) or "for educational purposes". It could even be done in co-located "camps" or even extended "group therapy" sessions (cf. http://www.focus-alternative.org/milieu.htm) -- resembling hack-a-thons or adventure tourism. Milieu wouldn’t be charging the "creators" but, rather, paying them dividends. For another point of comparison, think of the project as something like the Whole Earth Catalog.
So far in November, 495 "cups of patronage" have been purchased at 750words.com, which at $4 per cup comes to $1980 USD. That’s not millions, but it would pay my rent more than twice over.
While reading Adam Smith’s "The Weath of Nations" probably doesn’t qualify as an exercise in Paragogy, reading Warren Buffet’s Annual Reports for Berkshire Hathaway does, I believe. Warren is making it up as he goes along, just as all other business owners are, and what I cannot learn from the Report, I can ask him directly when I attend the Annual Meeting.
In summer ’08 I worked for Le Chateau des Enfants, an English language focused summer camp at The American School in Montagnola, Switzerland. Under the influence I impressed my fellow counselor & English Teachers by having a broken conversation in French with a cab driver on a ride back to campus. He didn’t speak English, I didn’t speak Italian, but we both spoke French. His was better than mine, but we communicated enough that he joked I was "the President" and I said "Non. Je suis un peasant." (No, I am a peasant.) which I illustrated with hand gestures indicating the President was high, near the cab’s ceiling, and the peasant (i.e. moi) was low, on the floor mat.
The way I learned how to teach was trial by fire. I regularly took notes while teaching in Japan, but it wasn’t till the next year in China that I made a post-class ritual of answering 3 questions: What did I do well? What could I have done better? and What did I learn?

That method was lifted from an article my father found about "Trading Journals" suggesting financial traders should keep a daily journal including those questions above. And that if they didn’t have time to review that journal at the end of the week, they didn’t have time to be a good trader.
For academic writing it tends to be good form to say up front "This is the significant and novel contribution of my paper (...) and here is why it is significant and novel (...)." This makes it easier for the reviewers to function as good "alpha testers" since they can focus on the novel aspects and decide for themselves how significant they really are, or focus on the significant aspects and decide how novel they really are.
"...members of society must have some shared methods that they use to mutually construct the meaningful orderliness of social situations" (Rawls/Garfinkel: 2002:6).
Early on in "The Pale King", Sylvanshine, a high-level assistant within the IRS, is sitting on a plane we are treated to his stream-of-consciousness as he goes from fact-to-unrelated-fact (we later discover he is a fact psychic) spending a lot of time saying how much difficulty he has passing the CPA and the amusement that gives his colleagues. Succinctly, the narrator confides "What you pay attention to is the whole ball game in the CPA and in life."

That said, in my summer course on Managerial Accounting I got a D and am headed on the same track this term with Financial Accounting. Why is it that I am loathe to do the work? Part of it is a lack of consequence for doing badly.
Again, if learning is the desired outcome -- not just for the individual, but socially (e.g. learning how we’re going to deal with climate change), then "learning" becomes an important economic good, almost a new "currency" for society. A lot of people use the market as a measure: successful businesses make money, others fail. In this context, the "fictional" currency of money for the "real" currency of learning and adaptation.
Despite "a generation of 20- and 30-year-olds who are used to self-organizing [who] believe life can be more participatory, more decentralized, less dependent on the traditional models of organization, either in the state or the big company," big companies and states are still very much a part of our daily lives.

Yochai Benkler, quoted in the NYT
limit of balloon: 20 miles

limit of atmosphere: 200 miles

Moon

700 m/s
-6 m/s/°C
200,000 m

20 m/s

5011°C
Nothing ever really happens "independent from the external". Among other things, Healy’s "new individuality" is at odds with the "post-individual human" (cf Sherry Turkle, "Alone Together"). Nevertheless, the phenomenology of this sort of mind is in some sense the proper target of paragogy.
Whether we call it "mind" or "virtue" or something else, there is both the question of constituting the self, and constituting the community. Foucault points out that Socrates’ "care of self" will entail care for the city. We see frequently that the city (or any other corporate body) does not always care for the individual. We might consider Deleuze and Guattari’s "becoming-woman" here -- or Fritz Lang’s "Metropolis".
An outsider voice is, quite often, neither accepted nor desired. We could compare the notion of a constituent moment, "defined as a historical moment when ‘underauthorized’ individuals seize the mantle of authority, and, by doing so, change the inherited rules of authorization and produce new conditions for political representation" [1]. (Douglass’s points have to do with the virtue of equality, not just with equality itself. [2])

[1]: Elisabeth Jacobs, "Not So Demanding: Why Occupy Wall Street Need Not Make Demands (Yet)"

[2]: Frederick Douglass, "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro"
Freeing the mind from excessive fervor . . . hate . . . delusion . . . conceit . . . wrong views . . . doubt . . . sloth and torpor . . . agitation and worry . . . lack of conscience . . . and shamelessness I will breathe in, etc.
"While I was working on the transmission, I noticed your brakes were gone, so I fixed those as well, that's going to be an extra $600."

"But I didn't ask you to fix the brakes."

"Well, it wasn't safe to drive on like that!"
These are the sorts of things we want: the fit of the hammer handle in the hand of the master carpenter, the positive camaraderie within a group whose social ergonomics are well suited to their task, the suiting of the words to the action and the action to the words of Prince Hamlet.
Max-Neef’s list of fundamental human needs provides a good place to start. For example, work helps to serve my need for "participation", for "subsistence", and for "creation", whereas rest helps to serve my need for "protection" (in the sense of immune systems), and the things I do for entertainment take care of a lot of the others. Keep in mind that the Max-Neef "needs" are, in fact, needs -- they all get served in different ways.
I know all the various arts and crafts and sciences in the world dealing with writing, mathematics and symbols, physiology, rhetoric, physical and mental health, city planning, architecture and construction, mechanics and engineering, divination, agriculture and commerce, conduct and manners, good and bad actions, good and bad principles, what makes for felicity and what for misery, what is necessary for enlightenment, and behavior linking reason and action. I know all these sciences, and I also introduce them and teach them to people, and get people to study and practice them, to master and develop them, using these as means to purify, refine, and broaden people. -- From the Flower Ornament Scripture (Avatamsaka-sutra), translated by Thomas Cleary
The hag, who had placed the costly gift of Arbaces in the loose folds of her vest, now rose to depart. When she had gained the door she paused, turned back, and said, 'This may be the last time we meet on earth; but whither flieth the flame when it leaves the ashes?--Wandering to and fro, up and down, as an exhalation on the morass, the flame may be seen in the marshes of the lake below; and the witch and the Magian, the pupil and the master, the great one and the accursed one, may meet again. Farewell!' -- The Last Days of Pompeii, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1834.
‘We have a legacy problem of hundreds of different metadata formats and it really doesn’t work for finding resources... if you look at the way that Google and Facebook work, they base their data not on conventional catalogues but on very informal things [such as] the usage of data and how things are related... so we are trying to see if we can capture similar information about learning resources. We believe that by doing this, that ‘second-class’ metadata can be used to build discovery systems and feedback loops.’

Daniel Rehak, interviewed by Kirsty Pitkin
The theory of paragogy was developed in the context of two online courses that we ran at Peer 2 Peer University (P2PU) in Autumn of 2010. One of the courses was called "DIY Math", and it was "designed to build independent study and peer-support skills for mathematics learners at all levels." The other course was called "Collaborative Lesson Planning", and it was built around the question "Can publishing and collaboratively building lesson plans online make them better?" The first course was not such a resounding success, but we learned a lot from it anyway, especially in a rich discussion about how it could be improved that took place in the second course.

The key outcome was an outline of an analytical framework that applies to peer-to-peer or peer-based teaching and learning between equals. The post-mortem analysis of DIY Math suggested that the concept of pedagogy is not sufficient in the peer-based learning context.
We are all existing in contexts that may or may not have a whole lot to do with "us". If we learn how to moderate these contexts in a way that works for how we work, we tend to feel better and more adaptive. If we work with the right set of supports, things go better than they would otherwise. Maintaining this supportive context is an ongoing process. Once we have all of this going nicely, we’ve realized the dream (in this case, the "productivity" dream).
Some people get by fine without books, phones, or computers, but no one can do without information.

Nevertheless, linguistic information is of a particular sort. It's different from a landscape in the sense of being discrete. A fisherman might rely on linguistic information when selling his fish, but when fishing, well, it’s a different story. (The Old Man and the Sea.) Yet, if we look closely, each physical body is somehow a "discrete landscape" with texture and form. Language is so many physical bodies made of sound or image.
First, with my youthful mind, and later still when it had matured, I would attempt to always find that singular position which inevitability applied to every situation. In other words, that which is everlasting and unchanging... beyond time, place and people... the Absolute.
Places like P2PU emphasize "participation" (which really amounts to a flow of text into and through the site). However, there are other online cultures which have less to do with this sort of system. (We can imagine a hypothetical "What's new, Pussycat?" website idea as a sort of limit point of the "economy" of text, which in some sense depersonalizes everything.)
Baudrillard: "The signifier becomes its own referent and the use value of the sign disappears to the benefit of its commutation and exchange value alone. The sign no longer designates anything at all."

The Dude: "She kidnapped herself, man!"
“KIDNAPPED IN NEW YORK”

The sensational comedy-drama, taken from life

Mr. Dooley disguised as the chief of kidnappers receives an important message.
Le Poète est semblable au prince des nuées // Qui hante la tempête et se rit de l’archer; // Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées, // Ses ailes de géant l’empêchent de marcher. -- Charles Baudelaire
POSSIBILITIES

(1) Love; (2) listening to an inner voice that tells you NOT to do certain things; and, (3) Xanthippe.

(a) Robes, (b) bowl, (c) belt, (d) needle and thread, (e) razor, and (f) a water filter.
I feel there are 3 keys to studying verbal communication in a new language well:

1 - Move to the country that natively speaks the language you want to learn. 2 - Be very social (talk to colleagues, go out to dinner, join local clubs, etc.) and very unafraid to make mistakes and look like a fool speaking the new language. Make mistakes over and over again. 3 - Hire a tutor.
In the beginning, there was PageRank. In further developing paragogy, we could make use of PageRank-like ideas, for example, by determining when people are writing about similar concepts in a content aggregator (like 750words.com or what have you), in order to indicate that these people are "peers". The amount of text that someone contributes that is related to a given topic would confer their ranking as an expert on that topic. Not everyone is an expert on everything, so varied degrees of expertise could be used to build teams (labor consumption or co-consumption bundles).
GERMAN ARMY: INSIGNIA OF RANK

GENERAL OFFICERS

FIELD OFFICERS

COMPANY OFFICERS

NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICERS

Plate X
If we want to understand what makes learning work, we should try to understand not just the desire to avoid pain and secure pleasure, but how moving between these states produces useful patterns. We can evaluate a learning context in terms of its efficacy at securing outcomes. For example, it is widely agreed that immersion is the best way to learn a language. Charlie isn’t going to be as motivated to master Japanese vocabulary if the opportunities or reasons for practice are slim. Joe isn’t going to study mathematics just for the sake of studying mathematics: there should be some point, maybe an engineering problem to solve. So, part of what makes learning "work" is the context and opportunity for application. At the same time, this is also what produces risks (e.g. risks of saying something embarrassing in a new language, risks of building a bridge that falls down). This suggests that people learn well when the stakes are high enough (but probably not too high: we don’t ask beginning engineers to build bridges until they have mastered enough skills that we can be reasonably sure the bridge won’t fall down).
Learning is ESPECIALLY fun if I’m studying something as a way to procrastinate from another assignment that is due. I have never been known to passively study accounting concepts in my free time, but you can be sure I will have fun learning some tangential fruit of the accounting tree, so long as its unrelated to the accounting exam I am cramming for tomorrow.
I’m at my new house. $400 per month of pure potential. It’s time to reassess my life. Right now I’m sitting in the dining room. It’s quiet, apart from a neighbor’s dog barking and one of my new flatmates munching toast in the living room. In the old house, one of the flatmates always dominated the common area with his TV watching habit. I don’t want to be "that guy", but at the same time I’m feeling iffy about keeping my laptop in my room. Days when I roll out of bed and immediately get on the computer (or rather, don’t roll out of bed and get on the computer) feel far too slack. On the other hand, if I don’t do my casual computing at home, I’ll end up doing it at work, and that can take up the entire day. And again, if I don’t go into the office at all... well!
The way to play. Start off with "singles", that's the plan. Then make it "doubles" if you can.
It is very easy to tout principles like "Break complicated tasks down into smaller parts", but in practice, there’s usually more complexity than one initially expects!
When my 17-year-old half sister asked me that question yesterday, I said, "I like working together with other people when I’m working on something that I don’t understand very well because it’s new for me."

It’s of course useful in such a situation if the work colleagues understand the topic better than I do, but even then, if I’m going to do my part I also have to figure out what I can contribute. "Research work" can be a great opportunity for me to learn things, but it’s still work, and things still have to get done.
I was trying to do zazen today and there was this guy outside with a leaf blower. I wanted to kill him.

(NB. I started blasting the rock "Cowboys v. Einstein" MP3, and my flattie appeared from upstairs - I didn’t know she was home. She said I didn’t wake her up though.)
We are somewhat less excited about visionary perspectives on what may happen to learning and education in the future, and are more interested in practical efforts. Partly this comes from our experiences, where brainstorming and opining reached the limit of its usefulness. We became more interested in developing systems that work.
SYphilis
FALSE SHAME AND FEAR MAY DESTROY YOUR FUTURE
HAVE YOUR BLOOD TESTED
It is not the state nor the school’s responsibility to educate you. It is your responsibility, just because it doesn’t work out doesn’t mean there needs to be systemic change or a "revolution". You need to take ownership over your own learning at as young an age as you can and realize with libraries and the internet (we’ll see how open it stays) you can teach yourself or find peers to study almost anything you could learn from ages 0 to 22 in schools. Don’t focus on changing the system, just learn what you need to learn, and if OER are the best way to do that for lots of people the system will be forced to adjust.
Although it is a simple model of learning, the model in paragogy isn’t necessarily much more complex. People talk to each other, certain outcomes are generated. "Learning" happens as the individuals involved master some new set of patterns. As a group, even more complicated patterns can be managed, at least in theory. Certainly in academia, the whole "standing on the shoulders of giants" phenomenon is what lets complicated ideas and approaches grow, though this may take significant real time.
A more paragogical question to ask is "what can we build together?" The fact is that, quite often, the answer will be "nothing" -- either because of "cultural barriers" (values aren't shared, language cannot bridge the gaps) or because of economic barriers (as much as two people might like to work together on something, their time may be taken up with other things). Other times, the desire to "work together" may be completely one-sided, reconstituting the "leech" phenomenon described above (this makes me think of "Stan" by Eminem).
I guess the best Paragogical lesson we can draw from popular 2012 musicians (i.e. Kanye, Nicki Minaj, etc.) artists is that when you are trying to learn something new or ambiguous, i.e. how to make a top 40 pop song, you are served well by collaborating with peers who are more accomplished than you. Once you do accomplish your goal, don’t forget to help new learners on their way to the mountain top.
The big idea (semantic) would be to track all the paragogo-
cال learning a user does online as a way for them to see what they have done, and to get as many analytics as possible about their learning to analyze. Each user would get their own paragogical "baseball card", so to speak. Once the data reached a suitable threshold, it would hopefully yield measurable insights into how peers learn together and how they do it well.
BASE BALL FOLDER SERIES

JOHN THONEY
Boston American League
Utility Man.

EDWARD V. CICOTTE
Pitcher Boston American League
Record for 1910:

Bat:
G 36 AB 85 R 9 H 12 SB 0 Per Cent .141

Field:
G 26 W 13 L 11 T 0 SO 104 Per Cent .577

MECCA Cigarettes
"Perfect Satisfaction"

factory negro fight N.Y.
HELP IS NICE, BUT …

It’s weird though: back when I was working on Lisp stuff, I didn’t think so much about hiring someone. Since I "got it" more easily, I just did a bunch of programming on my own. I didn’t necessarily finish everything, but think I did pretty well given the resources I had. It would have been nice then, too, to have a few more people around to talk to about the ideas and to hack with me on the code.
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