



## Applying Intersubjectivity for Professional Development

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### **Abstract**

*This is an intersubjective review of Loewen, G. V. (2012). Hermeneutic Pedagogy: Teaching and learning as dialogue and interpretation. Alcoa, TN, USA. Old Moon Academic Press. The four authors of the review used a reflective-reflexive, dialogic process to interpret and analyze Loewen's text. Their review is presented in a dialogue format that resulted after analyzing a much longer set of narrative data.<sup>1</sup>*

**Uvaldina Montoya Janecek** is an educator with experience teaching students of all ages, from prekindergarten to adult. She has been a bilingual early childhood teacher and a college instructor of education courses and ESL classes for adults. She has a commitment to leading organizations that serve students who have had challenges succeeding in traditional school settings. Uvaldina participated in efforts to establish some of the first community health clinics in underserved areas of Dallas County. E-mail: [Uvaldina.Janecek@untDallas.edu](mailto:Uvaldina.Janecek@untDallas.edu)

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**Yolanda Graham** is a lecturer with extensive expertise in early childhood education. Yolanda has an undergraduate degree in business and a master's degree in early childhood education. In addition to the many years of teaching grades prekindergarten to third grade, Yolanda has served as an instructional and reading specialist in a large urban school district. She was hired at UNT Dallas specifically to train our students in instructional strategies for teaching mathematics concepts in the early grades. E-mail: [Yolanda.Graham@untDallas.edu](mailto:Yolanda.Graham@untDallas.edu)

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial Note: This is a very unusual review! There are four points of interest that make this review an interesting read. The first one concerns the subject of the review: the book on hermeneutics. The second point is the form of the review: it is dialogue between the authors presented in its development. The third point of interest is the personal nature of the contents: the authors masterly show how their work on the review of the book penetrates their lives thus showing the real life with its changes, happiness, sadness, struggles and tribulations. The last point of interest that makes this review worth to be read is the pioneering character of the work behind this review. Glenda Moss used this review as a tool for professional development for the colleagues in her department. In my humble opinion, this review is the result of the very courageous, pioneering and inspirational work! (Mikhail Gradovski)

**Paula Mason** is a life-long learner and educator. Her research interests include the school disengagement of African American boys, motivation to read, and teacher self-efficacy. She currently serves as Manager, K-2 Curriculum & Instruction in for Dallas ISD and adjunct instructor for UNT Dallas. E-mail: Paula.Mason@untdallas.edu



**Glenda:** In May 2013, I agreed to complete a book review of *Hermeneutic Pedagogy: Teaching and learning as dialogue and interpretation* for the Dialogical Pedagogy Journal. I chose this book because it resonated with my perspective on teaching and learning. I am a former middle school language arts teacher. I primarily taught seventh grade students. In the school where I taught, most of my students spoke in an African-American dialect, which my colleagues called broken English. It took me a year to understand the patterns and not have to request that students constantly repeat themselves to support my need to understand them. Also, most of my students were discouraged learners since most had failed at least one elementary grade.

I quickly learned the importance of building relationship with my students and engaging them in real conversations. Within the first three weeks, I called every home and engaged in a conversation with parents to seek knowledge from their experiences as the primary teacher of my students. I would ask parents what they could tell me that would help me to be successful with their student.

Within the first two weeks of class, I made sure I let my students know that I did second grade two times and still could not read very well. I kept my seventh and eighth grade report cards on my desk to remind me that my students were in progress just like me. Being real with my students and engaging them in real conversations about learning played a significant role in creating space for my students and me to grow and learn. The key was conversation within a system of standardized curriculum and assessment.

It was interesting to realize that the multiple choice part of the language arts test included the African-American dialectical response as one choice for every question. I initiated conversation around this realization by engaging students in understanding and interpreting the politics of standardized language that privileged one language over another. As students were given the space to talk about the politics of the testing system, they could interpret their own identities in relationship to the system and their peers in the class. This deep interpretation of the standardized curriculum resulted in their learning the patterns of their primary language and the patterns of the secondary language I was hired to teach to them. Most passed the test, and none lost their dialect.

Perhaps that can help readers understand why *Hermeneutic Pedagogy: Teaching and learning as dialogue and interpretation* resonated with me and why I chose to use hermeneutic pedagogy for this book review.

In 2014, Mikhail Gradovski<sup>2</sup> inquired as to where I was on the review.

I replied, "I know that I received the book in late May 2013. I read the first 70 pages as soon as I got the book, started the review, and have not been able to get back to it since then. I wrote the first paragraph of the review on June 10 and was never able to open the book again. I will try to get back to it and finish the job."

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<sup>2</sup> One of the Book Reviews Managing Editors.

The following is what I had written: Hermeneutic pedagogy resonates with me because I, too, view teaching and learning as an interpretive process. Dialogue in teaching for learning is a hermeneutical process as both instructor and students become participants in a reciprocal process through which human growth and development may occur in classrooms. Loewen outlines the complexity of education in schools that both works to preserve the status quo and create space for thinking at the same time. He introduces the reader to the concepts of *hexis*, *praxis*, and *phronesis*, which offer a framework for understanding the existence of self in society. He defines *hexis* as conventional traditions and norms accepted in the majority of society. *Praxis* is defined as the process of thinking critically about those traditions in ways that create potential for new ways of viewing that may become *hexis* over time. *Phronesis* is defined as practical wisdom that results from living through reflective self-consciousness (*praxis*) to ever-changing senses of self, knowledge, and existence in relationship to others.

When I came to the University of North Texas at Dallas in the summer 2011, all of the faculty were junior tenure track or lecturers. To get the six junior faculty on tenure track started, I brought several scholarly books to a faculty meeting and suggested they all sign up in groups of 3-4 to do a book study and write a review for publication. Three completed one book and one faculty member completed one with me. My goal was to encourage the faculty to engage in reading scholarly works on teaching and learning, and engage in professional conversations for professional development and scholarly writing. I hoped this would open up space for developing learning relationships within our department.

In the summer 2014, we hired three new education faculty members. Two were hired as lecturers and one as tenure-track. In October 2014, I invited these new colleagues to review *Hermeneutic Pedagogy: Teaching and learning as dialogue and interpretation* with me. Again, I thought this would create a dialogic setting for us to learn from a study of the book. I proposed that we all read parts of the text and meet to have a dialogue to interpret the text and reflexively examine our own experiences. We recorded our dialogue and transcribed it to create a dialogical review of the text, which we think is quite creative because we used hermeneutic pedagogy to learn from the text and each other. We engaged in learning and teaching together through dialogue and interpretation of the book. We hope you will enjoy and appreciate our creative approach.

**Glenda:** Since this book is called *Hermeneutic Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning as Dialogue and Interpretation*, my thinking is that we're going to have a dialogue in an effort to interpret what we are reading and to dialogically come to an understanding of what this book is about and what hermeneutic pedagogy is. So, my thinking is that it would be a very creative way to do a book review of hermeneutic pedagogy by trying to use hermeneutic pedagogy to understand the book. To that end we are going to have a conversation about the text since we all read different parts of it.

Since I read the first 72 pages of the book, part one and the first chapter of part two, in which there were some key terms that the author defined that I think to a degree are important for us to have at least some common ground. The author says,

**Silviane Barbato**<sup>3</sup>: I would like to know why you took this decision.

**Glenda:** After reading the first 72 pages of the book and beginning a traditional review of the book, I understood *hexis*, *praxis*, and *phronesis* as key terms the author introduces to frame the process of understanding the relationship of knowledge based on traditions, and the critical process through which knowledge grows out of experience and interpretation in a living society. Therefore, I thought it would be

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<sup>3</sup> One of the Book Reviews Managing Editors.

a good idea to begin the conversation with a few quotes that introduce these terms. Did you have more thoughts on that?

The author says,

Hermeneutics is the art and theory of interpretation, and thus its language is that of the landscape of learning. (p.1)

The author also says,

Teaching and learning are simultaneously acts of interpretation and willing action, which affirms not only our present existence, but also our future, however unknown. (p. 1)

And then, the author defines two terms—*hexis* and *praxis*.

Custom provides the original template of human diversity and society, while the practice of theory extends, overturns, and modifies what has been the case, what is customarily so. Primary socialization provides the action of *hexis*, or what is taken for granted as the case, tradition, and norms. *Praxis* challenges the status quo by opening the previously singular and insular world into its manifold and strange recesses. The world as it is confronts us, and its alien quality makes further customary action impossible. (p. 1-2)

Shortly after that, the author defines *phronesis*.

Yet, it is only a combination of the two of these, what has been the case and what is strange, that can create the hermeneutic environment of *phronesis*, the practical wisdom of living on. Customs are reinterpreted, theory adjusted to suit reality, the social reality of tradition is reshaped, and the episteme of the serious business of constructing knowledge takes on its new historical task. The wisdom of experiential practice and reflective self-consciousness is phronetic in its character. (p. 2)

I will stop there. There were many other terms, but those were critical terms we should begin by having a conversation about what they mean and maybe our own experiences with those concepts.

**Uvaldina:** There is a little clarification in the last chapter (Chapter 6. Remaining at Large—the World Authenticates the Self) on hermeneutics. I thought it had something to do with the god Hermes. And it does. It says that “In the classical period the gods were thought to have direct access to ‘Logos, the word,’ because they “had created it,” and that their speech was perfect. They spoke in “perfect clarity” (p. 168). They didn’t need anybody to interpret it. But then it says that we do, that human beings are imperfect and so we need to clarify what we say. Referencing Grondin (1995), the author states,

The unitary task of hermeneutics in antiquity seems to have consisted in going back from what was said to what is meant, to the *vouloir dire* beneath the language. This understanding of hermeneutics tacitly assumes that language is invested with a meaning that precedes or goes beyond the uttered word itself. (Grondin, 1995, in Loewen, 2012, p. 168)

I thought it had something to do with Hermes, and it did.

**Glenda:** So, what you just read, within that you used the word tacit. That was something I had written in my notes when I was reading the definition of hexis, and I wondered if that is the same thing that people mean when they refer to tacit knowledge.

**Uvaldina:** Implied?

**Glenda:** Well, tacit knowledge is usually what we...

**Uvaldina:** Assumptions?

**Glenda:** What we automatically act out of tacit knowledge. We don't question it. It is just how it is. I think that knowledge for most of us came during our formative years. You grow up with a set of beliefs and way of viewing, and if you don't ever question it, you just react out of that being truth. Hexis was defined as "what is customarily so. Primary socialization provides the action of hexis." It seems like the way the author is defining hexis that it's that knowledge that comes from

**Uvaldina:** traditions

**Glenda:** yeah, traditions, our cultural perspective

**Uvaldina:** habits

**Glenda:** yeah, our habits

**Yolanda:** Couldn't we describe that as Intuitive or maybe reflective to a certain degree? It's something that we do without; it's very automatic. It's something that we see and perceive; and as we said, we don't question it, but we function in it, and we accept it as true. In contrast to this, when you look at praxis. Praxis is the idea that you see those ideas and in praxis is where we begin to question things. That's where your experience begins to help you look at what we define as hexis and question it. I think the author took those two terms and continued to let us look at them in a way that we can compare them, and yet we saw how they could work together, but at the same time it wasn't a linear relationship because in a linear relationship it would merge and the learner probably wouldn't see too much difference. But, if our understanding in terms of hexis is left to where it could be questioned, then your growth leaves two dimensional and becomes three dimensional because what happens is the two --I know this sounds kind of simplistic--like the two begin to dance. And, so what happens in the exploration of both, and I was reading chapter 2, they emerge and you have to put them both aside and then let them redevelop. The author at one point calls it a death, and that was very intriguing because in looking at our understanding of hermeneutics, understanding it from a philosophical standpoint and in some cases a spiritual and religious understanding, it's taking the old and saying I'm going to let it go and become something new. And so, for me, it seems like the author was expressing the idea and looking at the two and how they work together, the learner can optimally develop phronesis. Was when the two grew together to the point where you would let them both go and reemerge. It seemed very similar to me as when young children are developing schema, going through that process of assimilation versus accommodation. I saw some similarities there, but this is on a much broader scale. But the idea of when you take what you know and allow yourself to look at it differently, to the point where you question it, almost to the point of forsaking it; and at the same time, with your practice, you begin to examine it as well; to the point where you look at it, then question it, then examine it, to the point where you let it go. You question both what you know and what you practice to the point where they emerge, then you shift them and let them reemerge. And I think

the analogy of the death explains the depths to which you would do that – to such a degree that both would reemerge, and it would still have that same polarity, but yet it would still become cyclical.

**Silviane Barbato:** Maybe it should be interesting to mention here that “dance” is a term used by the author as it becomes clear in page 6.

**Glenda:** Yolanda, were you aware that Loewen used “dance” to describe the tension between *hexis* and *praxis*?

**Yolanda:** No, it was just the image that came to me as I read chapter 2.

**Glenda:** I don’t see the word “dance” on page 6. I don’t see it on pages 5-8. This was a great section. I underlined and highlighted and wrote margin notes because it was so engaging. I wrote at the bottom of page 5, “Don’t separate self from being in the world with its messiness. Teachers do this when they love the child but hate the behavior. The behavior is the child being. We must be with the child’s being to go on being together.”

**Uvaldina:** Yes. I was looking for that word “cyclical” because I think that’s implied that the process is not ever finished; that you just go on to another level, or attack one of those other recesses. It is what she mentioned about those recesses in your implicit knowledge – in your hexis.

**Silviane Barbato:** Would it be possible to add some more information on this dynamics?

**Uvaldina:** Yes. I was looking for that word “cyclical” because I think that’s implied that the process is not ever finished; that you just go on to another level, or attack one of those other “recesses.” “The tyche of mastery is the wisdom that sees living on as a work in progress, and the knowledge that such work cannot come to an end and yet, also, must nevertheless, end” (p. 1). It’s what she mentioned in the introduction about those recesses in your implicit knowledge – in your hexis, or the “status quo.” “*Praxis* challenges the status quo by opening the previously singular and insular world into its manifold and strange recesses” (p. 2).

**Glenda:** So, Yolanda, because your primary focus is early childhood, I can see why you would think in terms of little children, whereas my background experience was in teaching in middle school, so I immediately made a connection to when we try to interject something in our teaching that causes disequilibrium for students, and that’s why we teach our preservice teachers the importance of either introducing a new way of looking at something or a new concept that then temporarily puts students in disequilibrium and they have to process it. And so when I was reading this, I thought: Is this the same kind of thing? And then I thought: Or, is this a perfect example of how our tacit understandings are coming into play as we try to read this and interpret it? To what degree do we always see things out of some primary understandings that we already have; and is it too difficult to open up wide enough that there is something even more new in this? I kept asking myself: Is there something more new in this that I’m not able to see because my lens is clouded by where I am right now? When you’ve been in the education business for forty years, how easy is it to really see something new? I don’t know if that’s making any sense. Because I automatically connected these terms with other terms that I already am familiar with. Then I would ask myself if I am missing something. Is he talking about something that’s on an all new level?

**Yolanda:** I do think the author alludes to the idea of the willingness of the learner, so I think that what you’re saying is a very valid point. It does make you realize your own limitations; but at the same time,

just the awareness that there is a limitation, I think is a part of that dance. It's a part of our understanding of hexis and practice working together; just the awareness in itself that there is something that can emerge. I think it's like a stepping stone.

**Paula:** I think that's right on point because in my chapter, Chapter 5, it basically gives the definition of pronesis in a more simplified way as "the ability to reflect theoretically upon one's experiences" (p. 143), and it talks about the hexis and the praxis, like you said how they go together and build on what the author calls "practical wisdom." He's saying that as learners and as teachers, we are trying to get to our own practical wisdom and then help our students find practical wisdom. And like what you said about the dance, in one part he says,

Hexis now no longer is naïve about its origins and its inertia, just as praxis cannot rest in technicalities and abstract models. In its turn, praxis, too is transformed, not by disdaining hexis in seeking to supplant it, and neither by merely extending it without being fundamentally logical and critical about it. Praxis is transformed, rather, by deepening its understanding of where its own origins, the culture and historical roots of both custom and experience. (144)

And then it talks about critical and theoretical thinking;

The scientific and philosophical attitudes combined are yet practiced by human beings who also must exist in their various cultures as the day to day citizens of living on. It works together and we should transverse the boundaries of each. If we can do both of those things and take both of those things into account, then that's where the practical wisdom comes in. (p. 144)

It comes from us. We have to know how to take our experiences, like you said, and then take praxis and discover something new. In this chapter, he's saying that you have to be open to learn from your students. You have to be the student and the teacher. You have to be a lifelong learner, and you have to know that what you know is not the be-all; end-all. That there is more to it, and that someone else know something that you don't know – experiences and all that; and that it changes. It changes with where you are in life, your place of employment, your family structure. As all of that changes, your praxis and hexis changes as well. You have to be able to travel with that and know that this is changing, I'm moving, and this is something new. I'm learning; I'm still learning.

**Yolanda:** Your points are well-taken in that, going back to Chapter 2, the author gives examples of students that are talking about their teachers and the learning experience. At one point, the author talks about teaching, but not too well. I understood that to mean not too thoroughly. It's being able to present the learning situation and being able to step back because you see your role as you're not giving them everything, but you're allowing enough exposure to step back and let the learner engage in reasoning through that idea of praxis and hexis, and them coming to their new understanding. And then you are a part of that as well because as they grow and learn, you take part in that growth and learning as well.

**Uvaldina:** So it's not a matter necessarily, of not teaching thoroughly, it's not being dogmatic; not being so pedantic that you convey to your students that this is the answer, this is the way, period, because chapter 3 addresses that.

**Yolanda:** Yes, and in Chapter 2 as well.

**Uvaldina:** But in universities that happens sometimes.

**Glenda:** It seems like one of the core ideas for me in the text is this idea that...He's not really putting it out there and saying: "This is my thesis on education." He doesn't use that word, and I think that probably says a lot – the absence of that word, whereas, instead, the concept of teaching and learning is central, and it seems to me that one of the main points is that learning is human growth and development -- that life, all of life is growing in our understanding of who we are and how we relate spiritually and physically in this world. It made me think about how standardized education – and we've been moving in that direction for thirty years now – and I think I have seen a demise of the spiritual development of children because of that process. It's almost like society is wanting to define education within a body of knowledge and skills for producing and sustaining a capitalistic society. That's the goal of education. Whereas, I'm old enough that when I was in school it was about pure learning, and learning how to learn. I feel like I'm fortunate that when I went to college, I can remember making a conscious decision that I was going to allow myself to learn whatever I learned in every class that I took. And I look back on it, and I think: How naïve, living in a society that's driven by capitalism; but yet, it's been a great experience to be able to live that way -- kind of in a pure state of just learning. And yet, he makes a point on page 11 about...I'm just going to read this one; this paragraph. I had to read this over and over. It's only two sentences, but it's very lengthy. He says,

That praxis often stops well sort of coming to terms with hexis, as the vast majority of human thinking is both their tradition and in the world at large is one thing, but that it seeks to insulate itself against the world only further fosters the cloak of cultured invisibility that shields us from our existential condition and masks world as philosophical artifice, from an aberrant to instrumental rationality. [This next section is what I highlighted]. The teacher, or professor, is thus cast as an agent for a fashionable rationale of why the world works in this way and not others; or worse, why it *must* work only in this way, as it may be the best way. (p. 11)

So I think that the whole thesis of this book is that hermeneutic pedagogy is alternative to transmission pedagogy.

That transmission pedagogy has an authoritarian character, no matter how fostered with student-centered activities so far resisted officially by student course evaluations [and then "dash"], one of the chief divide-and-conquer tools of a suspicious and always-threatened management [hyphen], disallow both the inventiveness of critical theory and the spontaneity of reflective thought. (p. 11)

I just thought this was such a powerful statement. Watch how here in our teacher education program, we're always trying to teach the students about student-centered activities. And just this week, I read one student's philosophy of education classroom management paper, and they connected to the philosophy of progressivism because they are going to do student-centered group activities among the students; but everything else in the paper talks about how they are going to set up these rules and the procedures. And I'm thinking: What's going to happen in these classrooms when the students work together? Does it mean they are going to copy each other's work? She's going to put the students in rows to give the lesson and then let them work together on student-centered collaborative activities?

**Paula:** In rows...

**Glenda:** Well, they're going to move into groups. Then I think: Where did we start defining student-centered activities as the follow-up behind transmission; and then the part where they practice, instead of independent practice, you're doing independent practice with three other people at the same table.

**Uvaldina:** And then you define the activity ahead of time.

**Glenda:** And then I put “The goal of student-centered activities is often static knowledge-based.” And still you have those teachers with a goal that in the end those students will have this formula down, or this body of knowledge and they can answer the multiple choice questions on a test. It doesn’t really allow for this creative, alternative ways to solve problems.

**Yolanda:** I have a “wondering” from this because in what you had discussed before... When I was reading this, I began to reflect on my own educational experiences, my own journey, of growing up and approaching school from the standpoint of I saw myself more in the role of understanding the praxis part of it more because I was getting information and I realized that I began to compartmentalize that information. I began to think in terms of: Well, this is THIS world; but do you really understand MY world? And I did not make the connection between the two until years later. But at that point in my life, as a younger person going to college for the first time, I saw that dichotomy, and it was probably self-created, this dichotomy -- that that was THIS world, and I’m headed for THIS world. And I’m hoping to get some things here that will be a part of MY world, but if I don’t, I’m not worried about it. It was later that I began to put the two together, so I wondered... It was like I was seeing a little reflection of myself in this – to see my own growth and journey and my own development, interpretation, and understanding. I thought it was interesting how the author said the two actually do a dance; or the two work together to where they both – it comes to a point where you reject both, only to bring them back together again – it recycles. And there was another reference (I actually had to look this word up), and this is another mythical character, this character J-A-N-U-S, Janus. It refers to a character that is the god of beginnings, and I made the association with that cyclical process of learning, that learning is a process of constant new beginnings. So, you start with something; you begin to put the pieces of information together – your information; what you’re hearing and you let that permeate to where; you let it gel together, then you put it aside, or break it, or destroy it, only to let it resurface again into something different. It almost mirrors the rock cycle in science. You know how rocks will start out one way, and they will mix, and they will break apart, and they will re-mix. It’s kind of like the science of the Earth. So, from an experiential standpoint, learning is similar, in that it starts off one way, and different factors – I guess metaphorically, you could call it different temperatures, and different conditions come. So what happens to rocks is that it breaks down and it re-forms; and it breaks down and it re-forms. In the Earth, we see that happening over thousands of years. Similarly, in the human development, are we seeing that same process? I would also love to get insights from a historian because I think about the idea of hexis and praxis as I remember studying about the Dark Ages of 400 years in history class. They called it the Dark Ages because during that time, no new ideas were readily embraced. It was a time in history when there was such a connection to the status quo, that new ideas from someone such as Galileo and others were heretical. You know, the Earth is definitely flat. How dare you question that! Of course, now we see. And even in your biblical readings, you can read some passages and realize that the writer’s perspective was from an idea that the world was flat, which is why you get references to – Is God up there or down? – because the thought process is linear. So the message is still there interpretively, but when you dig deeper, you can see the perspective of the writings. So those are the things I was wondering about.

**Glenda:** I was wondering, as you were reading these, did any of you think about some major concept or belief or traditional way of looking at something that is critically important in society; that your perspective has changed as a result of your life experience in connection to that.

**Uvaldina:** Yes, there’s a section here that says that change does not come without confrontation, and I hate confrontation. To me, it’s painful, but I am paired with someone who is a confrontationist because he’s a journalist and he questions everything; and that has been painful for me. But I have seen things – it has opened my eyes to some things that I was not willing to see before. And I shake my head and think: I

can't believe I used to think that! The confrontation, the questioning has helped me break apart my hexis. And it's very liberating. It's very frightening, but it's liberating. And now, as a result, I can see where other people are fossilized in their thinking and aren't willing to be open and have this reflection, and to take advantage of the life experiences of others to see things in a different light. Yolanda and I were discussing that the other day, because we always have open conversations. She was talking about how some African-American people now are willing to see Hispanics and immigrants in a different light because it was so closed before, and she is beginning to see that transformation; and I am, too. They're beginning to make the connection about how their struggles are so similar. And especially in this area, that's been a big issue because people want to hold on to the progress that has been made and not let anyone take it away. It's been very frightening to try let go of that even just a little bit. I don't know how that has happened, but it has.

**Yolanda:** We see that in our students.

**Uvaldina:** Yes, in the students.

**Yolanda:** It's a beautiful thing. Once our students are in class together and they get a chance to discuss culture in classes like Foundations, where you're developing your philosophy and we talk extensively about culture; we see the openness and we see the willingness to share and consider another viewpoint that at one time either was that was challenging, or was something you had not thought about before.

**Uvaldina:** It's frightening.

**Yolanda:** It can be frightening, if you've thought about things a certain way, and you come into a public circle and it gets questioned. It can be frightening, but once you press through that and you stay open and you listen, you see the rewards in it yourself, and you see your students wrestle with it and then you see them show appreciation for having taken the time to look at it and not be frightened away. I think another aspect of it, too is in personal responsibility. As I was sharing before, looking at my own educational experiences, seeing myself question what seemed to be the norm and then realizing my own part in it.

**Glenda:** Can you give an example?

**Yolanda:** Yes. When I was a college student, I had come from an African-American poverty background, and I went to a university where there were students, from what I could tell, that came from families with means. I saw that situation initially as a situation that was against me; that I had to fight, and I realized later that at that time, that some of that fight was within myself. It was not all outer circumstances, and I realized: Wait a minute! I can change the outer circumstances. What I'm perceiving to be against me is not against me at all. This is actually something that can benefit me if I choose to let it be a benefit to me. So that was a shift in my thinking, and it helped me to embrace what I perceived to be as mainstream thinking, but I embraced it differently in a way where I didn't feel like it was something that was just being told to me; and you have to take it, just because it's being told to me; but rather I can accept it as a part of society, and I can use this information to my benefit.

**Uvaldina:** That's what we want for our students

**Yolanda:** Exactly

**Uvaldina:** ...to be able to see that. In Chapter 3, the author demonizes professors. He kind of describes them as prima donnas – you know, you have your little visual aids just in case you forget something

you're going to say. You plan all this out and everything– and I thought: Geez! Then he goes on to quote Nietzsche.

Frequently the professor reads while he speaks. In general he wants to have as many listeners as possible; and indeed, he contents himself with a few and almost never with one. His authoritative scene is priestly, sermonic, hegemonic, and vastly outnumbering of other the modes of pedagogy still. (p. 106)

**Glenda:** You know, that's a stereotypical professor as lecturer (sage on the stage); but that does not reflect at all what we've experienced in our faculty in our department of education. We don't have anybody who's that way.

**Uvaldina:** “Transmissive pedagogy is perhaps, at its best, an operatic version of vaudeville meets televangelism” (p. 106).

**All:** [Spontaneous laughter and groans].

**Uvaldina:** But you're right, the premise of the book is that transmissive pedagogy dominates classrooms.

**Glenda:** That's one reason why, whenever I had the opportunity to be the reviewer of this text, I picked it because I really believe in dialogical pedagogy. I used it with middle school kids, and I've used it ever since I've been in higher education; and from what I've observed in my faculty, there is a great deal of use of conversation in the style of pedagogy for most of my faculty, so I thought it would be a good read.

**Uvaldina:** Well, that's what's missing from it, though. You know you said that your dissertation had stories? That's what's missing to make it internalize, or to it give meaning in our lives, is the telling of stories. You just asked Yolanda to give a story, and I told one. That's what's missing. It's very thick.

**Glenda:** Right, but I think that what's going to be useful about our dialogical review. I mean, in some ways I think: well, it will also show that it's a good text that can lend itself... I mean, most texts can lend themselves to a dialogical interpretation if you set up an environment where you can have a conversation and where people can talk about their experiences. But I think this text in particular lends itself to deeper conversations about becoming, and about learning as becoming and to have critical conversations about how we continue to create environments. Like for preservice teachers, especially in Texas, to learn how to create environments where you can support children to have critical conversations about true becoming, and at the same time, make sure they understand the politics of state testing that can reduce their high levels of growth down to answering multiple choice questions so that they're not held back. That's the kind of critical pedagogy I used with African-American students on the writing test. Whenever they could look at the answers and if they put what sounded right, it was going to be marked incorrect because it had two dialectal answers – one dialect and another. Half of my students grew up in one dialect that would sound right – the right answer would sound right, and they would get it right. The other group of kids, if they put what sounded right, it was going to be marked wrong. So those children really had to become critical interpreters of the test, the politics of the test to understand who dominated the making and the cultural embeddedness of the test so they could look at it and say: Oh, I see my dialect, but if I choose that answer, it's going to be marked wrong because the dialect that is sanctioned by the school system, that's some of my peers' dialect. I'm going to have to mark that if I want to get it right. Do I want to resist, or do I want to be able to go to college someday so I can get into power? And we'd have those conversations – seventh grade. And I had a high success rate on the test, but it was only because

of those critical conversations. And then we'd watch it happen with our preservice teachers being tested to become teachers. It's the same politics, just at another level.

**Uvaldina:** Chapter 3 addresses testing, too. It uses some of the same words you did. It says,

Its official sanction and prestige, its gate-keeping qualities and the sanctity of both its presentation and even the spaces in which it takes place – to enter the exam room is to enter both the military and the church at once akin to a private club where proof of one's identity must be shown. It's a rite of passage and race to be the most successful candidate. (p. 101)

It eschews the testing culture as well. But you make a point. I even would explain to my second graders about the politics of testing. They would take a benchmark, and I would tell them, this isn't based on the results of real teaching. It's just a "thing," a mechanism, a way that they can...

**Glenda:** Yeah, that's what I did with my students. We would do real learning for five weeks and then for one week we would look at how this knowledge would be reduced to another form for state testing so they could recognize what they knew. I would tell them: "You know, the government is not real smart. They can only recognize knowledge in one way – a multiple choice test. And so we have to work with the government. You have to make yourself real small for this test so you can help the government see that you're very knowledgeable."

**Yolanda:** I had to do similar things with third grade and again, my third graders just happened to be predominately African-American, and what caught their attention was telling them: This is something you have to beat. It is not for you; therefore, you have to outsmart it. I put in them that sense of fight and that's what got their attention to help them achieve. I perceived that if I let them go into it passively, they would not have done as well. So I had to instill that sense of; you have to fight this!

**Glenda:** One year, one of my seventh-graders had the lowest practice test scores of any practice tests I ever gave, and was considered one of the lowest students in seventh grade. But there was something about him that gave me a sense that he had a whole lot more potential. And one day I told him: "You know, you love playing Nintendo games" (that shows how long ago this was); and I said: "This test is just like a Nintendo game. The government made the game. And you know how when you play your games, you learn the tricks of it, and you warp to other levels higher up, and when you play your games, you'll do them over and over until you figure out all the tricks. That's all this is – a game." From that day forward, I don't think he ever missed a question: and he got a perfect score on the state test.

**Uvaldina:** That's a good story!

**Glenda:** No other kid got a perfect score, and he was just shocked. He said to me: "When you told me how it was just a game, it was so easy to do!" And I think there's something wrong with the educational system when a little strategy like that which reduces it to a game gives a student the power to make a perfect score.

**Uvaldina:** So in my classroom with my students here, I teach my students to be critical of testing formats – that it's okay to be critical. That's part of one of their assignments – doing an analysis and critique of one of the testing instruments we use in the schools. And I tell them: "That's fine. Understand that it's going to happen, but the real assessment of the students; the real teaching of the students happens between you and the student, and nothing can take that away." I see a lot of teachers who get nervous about testing. It sets them on edge, and they just kind of give up.

**Glenda:** When I was reading the text, and a couple of you gave your stories of experience. The experience I had -- and I'm not sure I want to include this in our review. We can decide when we actually write this because we're going to write a professional review. But I thought about the disposition of most organized Christian groups towards the idea of homosexuality that I grew up with, and right now it's almost like there's a revolution going on with regards to that issue. And I hate thinking about this, but nearly thirty years ago, a young man whose family was really close to me and I saw him at an event and realized in a moment that he was gay. And I'll never forget saying to him: "Oh, no. Don't tell me you're a fag!" And I would give anything to take that away. I don't know, it just came out, and when I think about that incident, I realize that none of us, I don't think, are pure from having done hurtful things to other people. And anyway, my daughter is gay. And during a process of growing to understand her identity caused me to have a whole shift in my understanding of how people have even used scripture to develop the bias that homosexuality was unnatural. You know I had never even really thought about where we got the perspective we had. I just grew up thinking that in all of humanity that somehow that was unnatural, and it just seems like it's an example almost as big as learning that the world is not flat; it's round. It's almost as big an issue in human society, at least in the United States. Most of the time, if you ask somebody what their definition of what a Christian is, it's somebody who hates homosexuals. It's almost reduced the identity of Christianity to that one concept and position. I don't know if that's the kind of shift that this author would include in whatever this process that happens where you have a new way and you're challenged to look at something that has just been totally accepted as a tradition -- it's like a gospel-type knowledge, and then you have experiences that totally shift that perspective.

**Uvaldina:** It confronts them. It's a confrontation.

**Glenda:** It does. And it's like that particular issue in particular has grown beyond just little tiny individual pockets. It has become a very big conversation in society. I don't know anybody who's not thinking about where they are on that issue.

**Uvaldina:** Because they have friends, or family members, or somebody who is gay.

**Glenda:** Yeah, and people are talking about it, and that's what I think one of the keys in this is teaching and learning as dialogue and interpretation. Until people talk about issues, you cannot really get at the depth of truth. You know, we have kept silent on that issue. People have kept silent out of fear, and it seems like now, people are talking about it, and it's opening it wide open for people to reinterpret; and that's a good thing. It's the same thing with racial issues. I mean there's all these situations that are set up for people to have racial conversations. There's something in that process that has a healing effect that you can't get any other way. You can't get it from reading books and knowing right answers. Somehow, it has to happen in relationship to people.

**Uvaldina:** In your experiences, yeah. After the pain comes a relief. Like you said, some sort of peace, a "thank you," some sort of healing. You think back at the way you thought and you think: How could I have thought that way? How could I have been that way?

**Yolanda:** It is a healing, and it is a forgiveness because ultimately you learn how to forgive.

**Uvaldina:** A redemption.

**Yolanda:** A redemption because you forgive others, but then ultimately, when you face that uncomfortable feeling of having to change, then you have to not only forgive, you have to forgive yourself

and you have to accept that change. I understand what you mean about the painful part because when you have such a shift in your thinking and beliefs, that for you is so monumental...

**Uvaldina:** That's a good word for it. It's monumental.

**Yolanda:** It's monumental and so it's almost as if – for me I almost wanted an out-of-body experience. I wanted to put that old person outside of myself, and almost deny that that ever was me. I was so ashamed of it. But again, that cyclical process because you get to where you experience that pain; you reject that so briefly. And for me, I put it outside of myself, and then I had to go back and realize – no I'm going to still embrace that person because that's who I was at that time. I see things differently, so in that shift of thinking, I had to forgive myself and forgive my thinking from before in terms of where it came from, and take all of that together, share my experience, hear other people's experience, and then again it starts over. Then you begin to grow.

**Uvaldina:** Part Three was called *Praxis: What attempts the overcoming of previous prejudice*. So "prejudice" maybe is a good word for hexis? It's a stronger one, but he uses it.

**Glenda:** Yeah, it's at least our biases – our world views; and that's not to say that all of our views that we grow up with are totally misguided.

**Paula:** Right.

**Glenda:** But there are aspects that are biased in a way that results in detrimental actions on our part to other people. I mean, the words that I said to that young man.

**Uvaldina:** He might still hear them, if you think about it.

**Glenda:** Right.

**Uvaldina:** He says in the last chapter that going through this helps us live in the world we live in. That's the purpose of it. We go through this and it helps us be in the present; to live in our cultural milieu wherever we are.

**Paula:** Chapter 5 talks about what Dr. Moss said about turning over your thoughts. He begins talking about the idea of play, and says:

All of this points to the direction not of ploy – for this seeks to use the known in a manner which sabotages the others' self-understanding rather than aiding its maturing – but of play – which seeks rather the opening up of the self to the other in the risk of movement away from what has been as self. Common to the ethical notions of the 'neighbor' and virtue, practical wisdom as a sudden abode of Being in the language of learning appears but cannot root itself. Even learning from one's experiences means also and inevitably to apply them elsewhere in the form of understanding a new experience. In the encounter with the newness of what has the potential to become "hermeneutic" in the sense of both its demand that we interpret it and in doing so, its demand to overturn our prior prejudices, we are in a similar position as the child who learns in innocence, and hence the notion of playing has this added overtone of the absence of knowledge which is always to come: "In the Greek expression *paideia*, there is an echo of the light-heartedness and innocence of children's play. Its authentic 'object', if we can apply this word at all, is the beautiful. But that just refers to everything that commends itself without being of use for

anything, so that nobody asks what is its purpose" (Gadamer 1998:9). It is not that education has no purpose. Its telos seeks itself, that is, just like play, love, or nature, the ever-renewing properties of learning allow it to become a perennial part of the human condition and take its place alongside these other forms of beauty. So learning and therefore teaching must have this hermeneutic character, and it is through the playful creativity and endlessly seeking curiosity that human learning take their particular form, and thus also that human intelligence takes on its characteristic manner of searching, whether it be for its own origins or for a benevolent future. (p. 148-149)

**Uvaldina:** You see, you made connections to early childhood, too.

**Glenda:** Yeah, you did. I was thinking that's totally early childhood. We can continue to be like children our whole life.

**Yolanda:** We could. You know, tying that to an adult perspective, though. When I was teaching in my early childhood class, we began to touch on issues related to behavior guidance, and we laughed about some of the things we experienced as children in the area of behavior guidance. How do we look at that now as we are practicing to be professionals who guide the behavior of young children? And so we talked about the role of humor; and how sometimes when a situation or a topic is difficult to discuss or explore, a lot of times in human nature, we'll break the ice with humor. In my wondering about that – and I'd love to explore more – is that the adult way of playing? We come across concepts and beliefs that are uncomfortable. This is why we like to sit and hear comedians. A comedian will say things that we wouldn't dare say.

**Paula:** And about very serious things – very serious things.

**Yolanda:** Yes, they are serious things! And we'll sit there and allow ourselves to be entertained by it, and then later think about it. So, it's just a wondering. It just seems like an adult form of play.

**Glenda:** If it reaches the point of changing our way of viewing and acting. In my critical reading class, I always have my students read this article about John Dewey on reflection, and if they really understand what the author is saying about John Dewey and reflection, they will come to understand that you have not done reflection if it does not result in changed action. If there is no action following it, reflection has not taken place. In education, we've reduced most academic reflective activities to just saying what you're thinking. It's not true reflection. It's just an academic analysis. When I was teaching in Indiana, our students did part of their portfolio in one semester, and then the next semester they did the second part, similar to what we do here, except there, you didn't totally start over and do a new portfolio; it was progressive. So, when I scored the portfolio in part two, what they put in during that section was much different from what was in the first section. Most of their artifacts in the first section came from their ed. psych class. The professor in that class was pretty much a behaviorist – he lectured, you took notes, you memorized a lot of information, you had multiple choice tests, and the artifacts were just very perfunctory – I don't really know what word to describe them. The reflections seemed more descriptive than deep thinking. And so for the first assignment in my class the next semester, they had to read this article, and then they had to look at all of their reflections that they had put in their portfolio and tell which ones, if any, met John Dewey's definition of reflection. And they would all come to class with such high anxiety – does that mean that they had to take all of these out of their portfolio because none of them had resulted in any action – they were just descriptive. I said, No, you can leave them. That's baseline where you are on reflection. But what you do this semester should look very different with your new insight on what it means to be reflective. And it was phenomenal; you could see such a drastic difference in the portfolio,

and when people would score (a lot of outsiders would score the portfolio at the end of student teaching), and people would come and ask me, How did you get your students to reflect on the level that they were reading? And I said, Well, I just created an opportunity for them to do that. And I really believe that's true. It's creating – I mean every class they came to there was critical dialogue with other people. They would read lots of texts in common, but when they came to class, they were not going to get the last word from me. Sometimes, I didn't speak at all. So they were really challenged when they would come and they had read this article, and they thought they knew exactly what it said. And then they'd listen to other people that read it who heard something totally different because they had different experiences and they gradually started realizing; when I go out there and teach in a high school, and I have over 100 students, I cannot assume that they're going to all come thinking like the teacher. It's not going to happen.

**Uvaldina:** None of them will.

**Glenda:** None of them will – yeah. So they started really rethinking what was going to be their role as a teacher.

**Yolanda:** Understanding that you're facilitating. I gave an assignment to my graduate students among the writing that we had to do – the discussions and reflections; and I had a journal reflection. And I found in their writing that there was such an avoidance of that particular project. They treated it as a report, so I had to redefine it: This is a journal reflection. And in that journal reflection I had prompts, but they were open-ended. And so I would get questions. What do you want us to write about? I would answer, I don't want to restrict it that way.

**Uvaldina:** That's a problem for students.

**Yolanda:** I don't want to restrict it. Then you had those that would say, What exactly should I say? What exactly do you want?

**Uvaldina:** Or how long should it be?

**Yolanda:** So I would say, You know, I don't want to put those restrictions on it. I'd like to leave it the way it is because if I give you a prompt, but your experience is different, then I'm putting you in a position to write something that really didn't happen. So I would like it to be more open-ended. And then, there was a component in it that asked, What decisions did you make because of it? And I found that there were a few that were able to do it, but there were some that would complete other parts of the rubric, but when they got to that point, they either wanted to quote someone else, or they went back into report mode.

**Uvaldina:** Nobody has given them the permission to do that.

**Glenda:** Right. They don't want to take responsibility for becoming and being real. Any time I would give my students a journal reading assignment, they had to respond in five ways: They had to give a brief summary of the salient points. They could not regurgitate the article to me, so just in a few sentences tell what was the critical point of this article. Then they had to put a few key quotes that struck them, and they had to write a reflection on why; so it was analytical. Then they had to tell a reflexive personal narrative story of experience that connected to something in the article. And then they had to do the imaginary -- imagine themselves teaching in the future, and what might they do as a result of having read this. And then they would do a creative response, and anything went on that. I'd get poems and pictures, and diagrams – all kinds of things. But students had a very hard time figuring out the difference between summary, reflection, and reflexive. For a few of them, it all looked the same. And I'd send it back and I'd

say, I don't see the story. Where are the characters in your reflexive story? Who was involved in this? What was the critical incident? What did you learn from the incident? And they would have the hardest time because you're never allowed to write in the first person in middle school and high school – and usually not in college. And so it was very different. But if they are going to ever take ownership of their identity as becoming teacher, at some point they have to know themselves in the “I am” as a teacher.

**Uvaldina:** You teach who you are.

**Glenda:** Right. And so it seems to me that in some way it's connected to hermeneutic pedagogy in that we create an environment where students do have to become conscious of who they are and what they believe and can make statements to claim their identity and recognize their biases and analyze those in terms of their job as teacher. Is this is going to be in the best interest of my students if I come in and teach this one way because of my biases?

**Uvaldina:** I've got to share this part from chapter 6 because this addresses the question that students often ask us – Why do I need to know this? It says,

There is at least at first a paradox held within the ambit of curiosity as a human trait. The 'desire' for knowledge, and thus to have a new experience is not always identical with its 'necessity'. This tension gives rise to the notorious and sometimes irresponsible refrain 'need to know', referring to the basis upon which the ongoing test of the validity of knowledge should rest. We hear this as a plaintiff amongst the children of each new generation; 'Why do I need to know this?' And to this querulous query there's an ambiguous response. We cannot be sure what our children will need to know because we do not know ourselves our own future, let alone theirs. Phronesis can tell us what we have come to know and why, and that we have now such knowledge because we have found it to be necessary, or, at the very least, have understood it to be relevant to a problem or a misunderstanding that had previously gone unrecognized. But none of this can directly answer the question of the 'need' to know. We can only say to the child, and thus to ourselves, that we have found through experience that it is often the case that new knowledge 'comes in handy' in some way, and that the very uncertainty of the manner in which it may or may not be convenient or more than convenient to know something lends credit to the ability and desire to know about the world in general. (p. 164-5)

So I guess there's a promotion of phronesis as a way to live in the world, to have that skill because we don't know what the future holds. We don't know what we're going to need to know or what the children are going to need to know. When you talked about rocks, I envisioned the layers – the sedimentary layers, and the different layers of rock. To me that represented wisdom, like the quote from the movie *Stand and Deliver*: “I've traveled the path you've yet to travel.” I think that's what the principal told the kids. So I have something to contribute. So those layers of rock are wisdom.

**Glenda:** I remember my first semester in higher education, and I was using a dialogical set up in my classroom. I had students who were very frustrated because they wanted to know what I thought, and they started confronting me on it one night, and I said, “But everybody in here has knowledge of experience and can shed light on our reading.” And they said, “Yeah, but you have a doctorate.” And I said, “Three weeks ago I didn't.”

**All:** Extended laughter

**Uvaldina:** That piece of paper gives a perception of authority about knowledge.

**Glenda:** And I've had that happen more than once, that a student feels like I'm cheating them because I'm not somehow pouring out information to them, you know. They paid for my input, so to speak. And I think; no, you paid to come and learn and learn how to learn.

**Paula:** And I think that's the part that students don't get. I think because of the standardized testing, they're so programmed to get the right answer. In my language arts/social studies class, for their first essay, they had to pick a social justice topic. As we were talking, we started talking about the news and what was going on. We started talking about the two missionaries who had received the Ebola vaccine, so I started asking questions about it. I asked, "Well, what do you think about that? People have contracted Ebola for a long time, and thousands of people have died; but then these two people, they bring them here, and all of a sudden they have a vaccine, and these people are well." And they were like – "hmmm – well, so how did they figure out how to get the vaccine so fast?" And I said; How did they? And they were getting out their phones trying to figure it out. And I asked again, "Well, what do you think?" And then somebody said, "Well, duh, they already had the vaccine!" And this one student sitting in the back, all the blood rushed from her face; she was pale. I could see it all over her. And I asked, "Are you afraid? You look like you're about to faint." She said, "This is really scaring me." This poor girl looked like she was about to faint. It hit her that something wasn't right. And then somebody said, "Well, if they already had it, how did they get it?" And I said, "How do you think they got it? How do they make vaccines? We've studied vaccines. We've got vaccines for polio, MMR, and all that. Where do vaccines come from?" And one of the students said, "Well, you know you take whatever the disease is – that's how you make the vaccine." And then light bulbs just started going off! So, they were like: "If they already had the vaccine, they had to have had the virus!" I said, "Okay, so where do you think the Ebola virus came from?" And someone was like: "Can you just tell us?" I don't know where it came from, can you just tell us? And then they just went on and on, and someone was just like: "Well, then if they had the cure to Ebola, is there a cure for HIV somewhere?"

**Uvaldina:** Or cancer.

**Paula:** Or cancer.

**Glenda:** And where are they doing the testing for drugs?

**Paula:** And on whom?

**Glenda:** Yes, on whom? And who is advantaged by that testing that is done?

**Paula:** And man, it just started popping around the room. "And what about this?" and somebody said, "Hey, do ya'll know the first Malaysian plane that disappeared was full of the top researchers for HIV? And they were going to a conference."

**Uvaldina:** They started questioning.

**Paula:** Yes, they started questioning. And I said: "That's why critical thinking and critical literacy is important. You should not let someone else tell you what to think." And they were just like: Wow! And then at the end of the class, one girl was like: "So, can you really tell me where?" I don't know – I don't know. So I don't think students intentionally are that way, but I think they've been programmed that way, just because of the way this generation has had standardized testing – there's one right answer. And now for us as professors, trying to get them to think; it's like we're working with kindergartners.

**Glenda:** It's almost impossible.

**Paula:** You just have to take baby steps, just like you would with a kindergartner – just introducing them to learning – how to learn; how to learn on their own without someone force-feeding it to them.

**Uvaldina:** I had mentioned a writing assignment in my Intro, my 3470 class, and I always tell my students that I enjoy reading their essays so much. I always say that, even to the little kids – I just love reading your journals because I want to encourage them to write. And I do, I really enjoy it because it gives me insight. I said to my class: I really enjoyed reading your papers. They were so good. It gave me so much insight. And this one girl said: “We weren’t taught to write! We were just taught to pass the test. We need to know how to write.” I said: “You’re here now; we can do that.” Because she knew; even though I said that, and I meant it: she knew that she needed help.

**Paula:** A lot of them say that, coming from high school. They say that we just get a prompt and write, and the teacher gives a grade, and she gives it back. Then we get another one the next week.

**Yolanda:** I've experienced that, too.

**Paula:** They didn't know anything about the writing process; the traits, any of that. They said, we just write – get a prompt, write, then she gives it back; then do it again.

**Glenda:** I published an essay years ago in the National Writing Project Quarterly (or whatever it was called), and the title of my essay was, *The five-paragraph theme underprepares children for college* because it was very formulaic for the test.

We agree with Loewen's assessment of the current nature of classroom practice as transmission pedagogy that lacks critical thinking, reflexivity, or the advancement of wisdom. We would recommend *Hermeneutic Pedagogy: Teaching and learning as dialogue and interpretation* as a book study for a corpus of educators in any EC-16 setting. While we have not presented the practical strategies presented in the book, we modeled in this book review a dialogical process for interpreting the text, and our life and professional experiences. We each have the opportunity to apply the wisdom we gleaned from this learning experience in our classrooms and life.



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