Experiential Education Philosophy: The Role of Risk

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Risk: the potential of losing something of value
The Epistemology of Risk:

- **Epistemology:** the philosophical theory of knowledge
Actual Risk vs. Perceived Risk:
The Adventure Experience Paradigm
The presupposition behind the demand for risk-free education is patently false. It is false because risk-free education is a contradiction in terms. Education without risk is no more possible than having water without moisture.

- Jasper Hunt
Which Is Riskier?
How to Determine the Ethics of Risk:

John Stuart Mill
Consequentialist Ethics

Immanuel Kant
Deontological Ethics
Consequential Ethics:

Mill’s *Utilitarianism*:
“A test of right and wrong must be the means, one would think, of ascertaining what is right and wrong, and not a consequence of having already ascertained it”
Educational Application of Consequential Ethical Ethics:

- *Summum bonum*: maximum growth and learning

- Educators should use a risk-benefit analysis

- Pose the question: does the potential reward outweigh the risks?
Conducting a Risk-Benefit Analysis:

- **THE PROBLEM:** Easy to quantify risks, nearly impossible to quantify benefit.

- **Bill Byrd’s Solution:** consider educational goals only.
  - If they are significant, instructors have a duty to expose students to risks.
Why it still just doesn’t work ...
Deontological Ethics:

Kant’s “Principle of Will”:

“Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good, without qualification, except a good will”
Educational Application of Deontological Ethics:

- *Summum bonum*: students’ wellbeing

- What does this mean for a decision maker?
WHAT TO DO THEN?!  

SOUND, BUT IMPRACTICAL: 
Consequential Ethics too impersonal
Deontological Ethics too ethereal

Informed Consent
A Consent-Based Approach:

Minimal First Principle:

“It is acceptable to subject one to risk if and only if it is reasonable to assume they have consented to that risk”

– Andreas Teuber
Informed Consent is Ethical:

How Dewey, Hunt, and Other Philosophers “Prove” This:

1. Consent = being informed
2. Lacking information = enslaved by ignorance, can’t make decisions
3. Freedom is ethical, so consent is ethical
The burden of proof and decision-making lies with the instructor

- Quantify risks and benefits as much as possible
- Set parameters
- Informed consent