

**Hamilton, M., (2006). *Just do it: Literacies, everyday learning and the irrelevance of pedagogy*. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 38(2), pp. 125-140.**

Hamilton begins his article with a discussion of the definition of informal learning. In working towards this definition he contrasts learning that takes place through everyday activities such as booking a flight online or assembling furniture, and pedagogical learning that takes place in formal educational settings. Between these two extremes Hamilton settles with a pre-existing definition of informal learning as “the pursuit of understanding...undertaken on one’s own...without either externally imposed criteria or the presence of an institutionally authorized instructor” (127). With this definition in mind, Hamilton briefly summarizes two studies that have dealt with the idea of informal learning in the US and Canada. He shows that informal learning is prevalent amongst adults, defying typical relationships that formal learning has with social class, prosperity and success in initial schooling.

Hamilton then moves on to review literature in the field of New Literacy Studies (NLS), claiming that these studies are “implicitly concerned with, and informed by, models of situated and informal learning” (129). Hamilton focuses on how different literacies have been researched in a variety of domains, paying specific attention to more vernacular literacies. For example, he mentions groups such as children of low income families and prisoners who demonstrate a wealth of knowledge that they use to negotiate the literacy demands they encounter daily despite having little formal education. He continues to explain the relationships between literacy practices and identity, and how these practices, in and out of formal education, are variously shaped to be different in different situations. Hamilton also moves to describe how the different identities that we develop are involved with how we learn informally. For example, he describes how adults learn from children and how children learn from grandparents, depending on their individual attributes and areas of expertise.

After this discussion of NLS and their relationship to formal/informal learning, Hamilton stops to analyze the resulting critique of pedagogical learning. The critique suggests that pedagogies can actually suppress learning rather than support it, alluding that perhaps learners should be left to their own means in educating themselves. Hamilton

counters this suggestion by saying that pedagogies have a valid argument in their defense. For example, that informal learning can reproduce inequalities “through limited and ...untrustworthy networks”(134), and that such learning is “tacit, incidental, serendipitous and unevenly distributed” (134). Following these opposite points of view, Hamilton looks for a middle ground by validating both formal and informal learning and suggesting that formal learning strengthens informal learning by extending the range of resources that are accessed by informal learning and by increasing the range of learning strategies.

Hamilton finishes by saying not to dismiss pedagogy but to find the pedagogies that are needed. He suggests pedagogies that assume the “richness and complexity of everyday literacies” (135) and that are informed by ethnographic stances. He believes pedagogies such as these incorporate a blend of formal and informal learning.

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I decided to read this article based on the phrase “the irrelevance of pedagogy” in the title. It immediately stimulated my interest because I am interested in how casual, non-pedagogic conversation can stimulate learning a second language. During my own reading around the subject of NLS, I began to get a sense that there was an homogeneous view of pedagogy in the western world; one that saw formal learning as institutions expounding the same inflexible dogma day after day. This is the same critique of pedagogy that Hamilton surmised from his review of NLS literature, one that hindered learning more than it facilitated it.

Hamilton’s conclusion was a call to stop viewing pedagogy as a static presence and instead to search for *pedagogies* that are compatible to the multiple literacies that play such a large role in learning, both formally and informally. This viewpoint really struck me because I’ve often felt that pedagogy was irrelevant to many people who struggle with formal learning and that we should legitimize a less formal learning practice in order to even the playing field between those who are privileged to be academically literate and those who aren’t; in other words, to expand the reputation of formal learning to encompass a range of pedagogies, both formal and informal. Trade schools for example, and apprenticeship programs, are ways of learning that are not as

academically formal as universities but can lead to very successful careers. Yet these types of learning are viewed as remedial for those who struggle with formal learning.

After reading Hamilton's article I visualized a Platonic type of learning environment where a space is created for learning to occur and there are experts available but the learning takes place casually and informally. Although this vision leaves much to be desired I think it feeds on Hamilton's concepts of multiple literacy practices and their connection with different discourses and identities to foster a pedagogy that emphasizes a plurality of approaches to learning and literacies.