Creating opportunities for learning opens teachers, students, and the world around us to a swirling air of possibility. As students and educators, we desire spontaneous, unexpected moments of learning, a taste of air that catches our breath in startled surprise. In the role of an educator, I work with people in many settings from the conventional classroom to the outdoors; I often ask teachers and students alike to talk about unexpected moments from their experiences. Time and time again, I hear descriptions of brilliant sunsets, and feelings of intoxicating joy when summiting mountains or kayaking white water. Their bodies animate with a remarkable presence as if they are back fully experiencing the event through its re-telling.

Individuals often undergo a state of infinite magnitude, a shift in ways of being. “These are moments when we forget ourselves and seem to become part of all being” (Zander & Zander 2000, 20). As Zander & Zander effectively indicate, paradigm shifts require a leap of faith to practice shifting “posture, perceptions, beliefs, and thought processes” (4). Zander & Zander call for practices “based on uncommon assumptions about the natural world” (4). Utilizing examples of transformational shifts such as the internet, paradigm shifts in science, or the spread of new religions, Zander & Zander suggest that “transformation happens less by arguing cogently for something new than by generating active, ongoing practices that shift a culture’s experience of the basis for reality” (4).

How do educators model and teach such generative practice?

“In the universe of possibility, you set the context and let life unfold”

—Zander & Zander, 21
Such education moves beyond predicting learning outcomes and asks us to engage in the risks inherent with possibility. These are the unexpected spaces of possibility which freefall\textsuperscript{[2]} pedagogy seeks, and which this writing hopes to illustrate.

First, this article unfolds perception and initiates a journey of understanding freefall pedagogy. Let us re-look at the picture above. What unfolds when the learner leaves the top of the jump?

(Duritz 2002).

Second, I will use pictures and video of coaching freestyle ski jump qualifications to help elicit a perspective which may be unfamiliar to the pedagogue. I hope to offer an experience of practice that opens spaces, generating a shift in today’s views of education and everyday living. Most importantly, I ask you to look for thoughts, actions, fears, and to notice or inquire: What is the pedagogy that orients you to enacting possibility? How are your thoughts/actions in this moment keeping possibility out of view?

Having set the stage or activity before you for reading this article, we are now ready to engage with/in the world of freefall pedagogy. Hopefully, I have given you the equipment and initial instructions required to take off down the jump ramp and to land safely. It is up to you as educator/athlete to remain open to the moments of freefall that are occurring even in this moment as you read, breathe, and participate within your environment (or world).

Not being a theoretical physicist myself, I can not tell you whether breathing possibility is directly connected to the entire universe. However, I can ponder how molecules are touching, tickling, journeying throughout my earthly world interrelating with many beings wondrous, natural, and spiritual that flow about and through me on wind currents I breathe. Will my breath of possibility be yours—that unexpected catch of breath—to inhale?
Perhaps this writing may have this same wondrous feel as the upturned leaves before a storm. Have you ever been outside the moment before a storm arrives when the winds have a silence yet a presence as you see leaves upturn, and hold for seconds showing the vulnerability of their undersides? When the wind blows, it feels as if I am approaching the top of the jump getting ready—a kind of adrenalin rush like the wind blowing before a rain storm.

The unexpected is this same air I enact and long to taste in my own pedagogy of life long learning. This is my perceptual reality of how the world exists as a fluid merging of action and awareness—a paradigm shift of our perceptions (Capra, 1996) or a transformational shift (Zander & Zander, 2000) with how we interact and view the world. Unfortunately, too often in education we are taught and trained to harness a “safe” control; a grasping that can be communicated in sequential steps to alleviate our fears of letting go.

Freefall pedagogy may seem counter-intuitive or “feel” illogical to the “normal” or familiar approach of conventional teaching strategies. Teachers who challenge students with new ways of engaging in the classroom often create an uncomfortable space for learning and yet, this is the space where possibilities emerge. I am referring to the enactive space of freefall—the time in the air, where learners let movements unfold, or educators let learning unfold.

It is the role of educator to help learners become aware of these spaces of possibility.

I am not advocating that we all step to the top of the jump ramp, but that in educational practice we need to let learning unfold. Letting go is about living the “death of
moments”[3] to allow fresh opportunities or moments to unfold like the wind before a storm. Most students grasp fear at the top of the aerial ramp, however, a moment of hesitation..

…will result in an awkward plunge into the water, and, not always feet first. Through first hand experience, students come to recognize their hesitation—a lack of trusting to let go—and can learn to change their actions by letting go in the air to land safely on both feet. (When students transfer this learning of jumps in the pool to the snow slopes, not landing freestyle jumps on ones’ feet can be detrimental to one’s health!)

Safety exists in letting go, in practicing an encounter of living the unfamiliar. Yet, we must embrace simultaneously all interconnecting actions, whether they be amongst students in the classroom, or with the air we breathe during our journey of pedagogical actions. How do educators grasp their own fears of letting go and allow the air of possibility to unfold through pedagogical actions? I believe that we, as educators, all need to taste this air just as our students do learning new aerial jumps.

So, how do we “set the stage” or open our bodyminds to the flow of air of molecules surrounding us? How do educators stand before a full classroom of eager learners and help them learn to ask questions without asking the questions themselves? How do we create this flow experience as Csikszentmihalyi (1975) refers to in his research of “flow activities” to such acts of teaching or when performing aerial jumps in the classroom?

Freefall pedagogy is not a step by step process, although a ski jump trainer, can give you the steps to get ready to go off the jump. Freefall pedagogy is the action or enacting within the context which I refer to as the space of possibility. It is not just the act of jumping, it is the allowing of the body to flow, an athlete’s interpretation of “being in the zone,” or a learner’s connection and interaction with the surrounding air particles. Csikszentmihaly (1997) refers to such moments or experiences in harmony with each other as “flow experiences” (29). At times it feels like the stirring of leaves before a storm. The leaves open our awareness for preparation before the storm hits, much like the chaos that can ensue a classroom of learners. This is the space—the time in the air, where learners let movements unfold, or educators let learning unfold.

A degree of uncertainty is always implicit and necessary in the process: . . . ‘Uncertainty is the existence of flow. . . .'—Csikszentmihaly 1975, 80).

As educators, if we can just give learners a taste of the air of possibility, we empower them to continue to seek their own enactive and emergent pedagogies. A true pedagogue does not feel as though he or she needs to grasp learning situations. The freefall pedagogue’s
“role” is to model and teach the learner how to “set the stage” each time he or she approaches the jump so that possibility and flow can unfold. “In order to experience flow, it helps to have clear goals [for a lesson, or for aerial spins]—not because it is achieving the goals that is necessarily important. . .” (Csikszentmihaly 1997, 137).

This notion of freefall pedagogy is an enactive approach where we teach through interacting. We open unexpected experiences and guide students in learning how to taste possibility and savor it like an intoxicating wine. True freefall pedagogues invite “their students” to become their own ultimate educators, to unfold their own enactive awareness or approaches to experiencing the universe of possibility. This point is vital as I can not physically be in the air with the students during the aerial, nor can I physically be in their bodies learning the laws of motion.

I prefer to drink Chardonnnay, and to obtain only “slight air” over the snow when skiing. However, it is not about what I prefer as an educator or connoisseur of fine wines, but how you as the reader undertake such leaps of faith to engage in your own generative practice of freefall pedagogy. How might learners, students and educators together, sidestep the path of conventional classroom learning to engage in classroom experiences that open spaces of possibility? How might they come to trust enactive learning that embodies the air of possibility?

If, as the reader, you seek more from this article, I ask you to proceed back to the top of the jump (beginning of the article). Focus on these two questions:

- What is the pedagogy that orients you to possibility?
- How are your thoughts/actions in this moment keeping possibility out of view?

OR

Set the stage yourself for what you might unfold through experiencing and reading this text. Let your ideas and thoughts emerge, embody, and taste the uncomfortable, and allow the unexpected to flow within the air around you and re-experience your own practice as a pedagogue.

Notes


[2] Throughout this article, “I present different ways of “seeing” that may require a little more thought than may at first appear. Words, for example, are intentionally used in ways to open spaces for new ways of perceiving that align with enactive thinking such as bodymind. For instance the verb “experiencing” shows that experience is a dynamic process continually arising through action and interaction. Also the word “freefall” connotes more than falling down but also the concept…where an embodied awareness arises out of unexpected happenings” (Haskell 2000, xv). I further expand on this notion of freefall “to assist our thinking of pedagogy, such that freefall pedagogy (where I combine two words) opens up a ‘space’ for arousing insight or possibilities” (Haskell, xv).

[3] By “death of moments,” I am talking about a theoretical perspective that in, order to live each moment fully, one has to let each moment die. Death is not something “bad,” it is a celebration of living the next moment. Our social history stays with us to live within the next moment or context. This philosophy comes from the Buddhist thinking of letting go and not trying to grasp every moment, but to let the unexpected happen and unfold.
References


About the Author

**Johnna G. Haskell**, Ph. D., is an independent scholar in Carrabassett Valley, Maine. Her research interests explore outdoor experience, ecological and enactive perspectives, and freefall pedagogy. Her passion in education explores the unknown and unexpected. She is a co-editor of *Unfolding bodymind: Exploring possibility through education* (Foundation for Educational Renewal, 2001), http://www.great-ideas.org/bodymind.htm.

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