

# Some Random Thoughts About Pathways



Of course there are exceptions...here I think of the Great Ramp in the National Art Gallery in Ottawa, which was designed to slow people down and unhurry them before they enter the gallery. Some learning experiences do need teachers to facilitate deeper, less-efficient learning, and what a joy those can be.

Another thing I learned is that time is precious. Every second of mandatory time in a learning experience should actually be necessary. In metaphorical terms, the winding path surrounded by flowers might be nice, and might meet lofty design goals, but most walkers are just going to cut across the lawn. Put the path across the lawn. Provide enticing side paths if you can.

When students take shortcuts, or even cheat, there's an assumption that they don't know where the traffic light is. Sometimes they don't. But more often, I think there's something else going on as they dash across the metaphorical road.

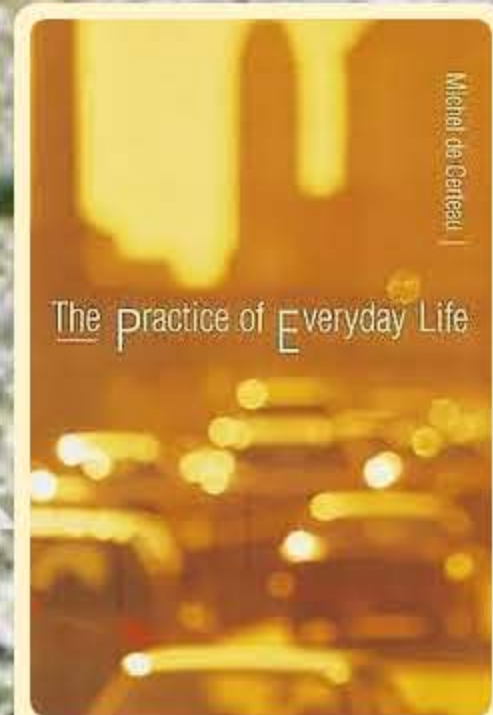
It would be good to find those common paths that many students take...perhaps just install a second set of traffic lights there, even if it seems irrational.

## Nugget - Where the Thoughts Start



openfacultypatchbook.org  
Patch Thirty Three – Desire Paths and Other Course Design Ideas for Humans | The Open Faculty Patchbook

Excerpt: "I recall once looking at a well beaten stretch of soil between some shrubs in my daughter's school yard. A friend with a background in landscape and urban planning described it as a "desire line" or "desire path"...it seems clear to me that, like the young creators of those desire paths, students will always find unanticipated and wonderful ways to enter, exit, and navigate through the learning events and environments that we design, and these alternately carved-out tracks should naturally contribute to our own learning and growth as designers and instructors."



A wonderful book from my Master's degree. In particular, I'm thinking of the chapter on walking in cities and how walkers navigate the city in ways that urban planners and architects can't anticipate or control.

**Linda Stewart**  
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April 18, 2010

When I read the first paragraph of the introduction, I knew I had found a theoretical home. Michel de Certeau's "investigation of the ways in which users—commonly assumed to be passive and guided by established rules—operate" is about freedom, resistance, access, and the art of "dwelling" in the everyday. Reading de Certeau validated all the ways I have been teaching inductively. My practice was found in his theory. A reversal of good fortune. Be certain to read Chapter 7 - "Walking in the City" in Part III - Spatial Practices. I return to this text time and again for understanding about everyday life, which "invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others" (xii). Can't put a date that I "finished" this book. It's an ongoing visit.

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As an anthropology Phd student I've read so many books on this area and this is the first book I barely understood anything from it and suffered every moment of reading it.

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It's funny and awful that a book about "freedom, resistance, access" would be impossible for a student to read. **Students are the walkers of the education system.**

QUESTION: Can we make courses more "walkable"? Or will students always seek and find their own paths, whatever we do?



I think of a busy road near my house, where people routinely cross about 20 feet away from a traffic light. They will risk their lives rather than walk that 20 feet. Why? It's not always easier or faster.



8 Things To Know About the Experiential Learning Cycle (Part 1)  
One thing I learned from being an instructional designer in a business context is that learning happens all the time, constantly. We are learning as soon as we wake up. If we spend 12 hours learning from our environment to do things one way, and an hour in a formal course learning to do things another way, the impact of the formal course will really be limited.

QUESTION: How does experiential learning (in the original learning-all-the-time sense) relate to student path-making?



Paolo Freire reminds me that sometimes what life teaches us is wrong, and sometimes the worn path that we keep following is a rut we need to get out of. For example, students want the fastest path to passing (or getting a particular grade), but does the focus on grades serve them? What social structures are creating that focus?