

Reading for Resilience with Adult, Male Prisoners

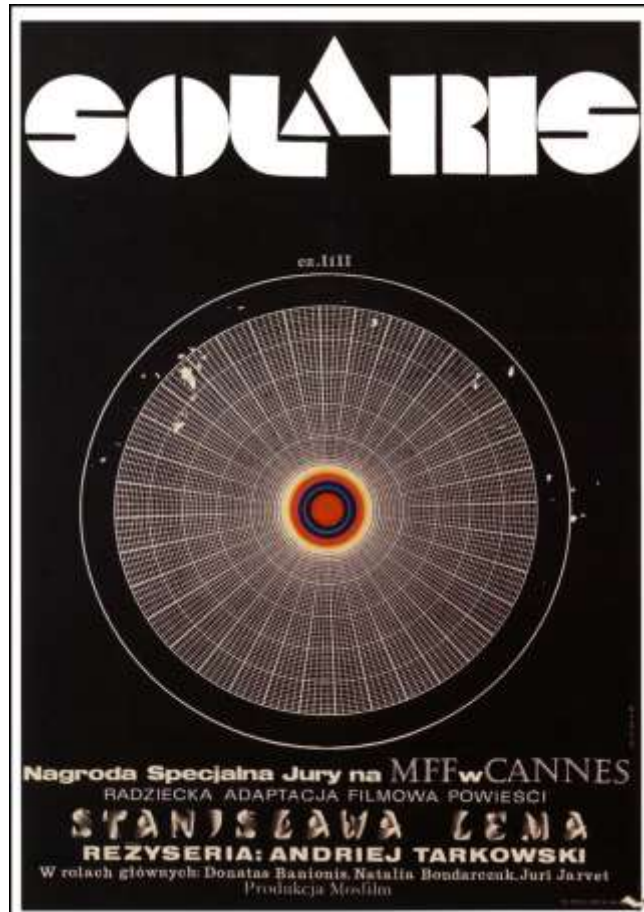
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Science Fiction



Is it possible to teach people to read life in plural ways?



Resilient Learning

(resilient child learner) “. . . one who faced considerable challenges - more than those of an average child – yet ultimately was able, as an adult, to function as an independent, caring individual” (Challener, D. 1997, p.7)

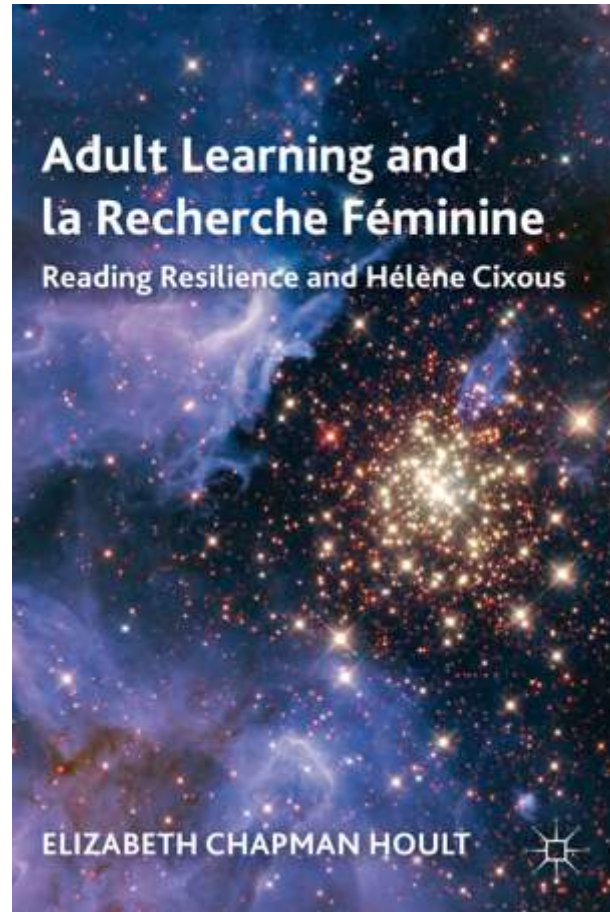
(resilient adult learner) “(A) resilient adult learner is one who has faced considerable challenges – more than those of the average student-yet is ultimately able to succeed and to thrive academically.” (Hoult, E., 2012. p.1)

Previous work: Resilient Adult Learners

They are successful despite:

- 1) traumatic events in their lives
- 2) lack of capital
- 3) being non-conformist.

Reading Resilience



Bourdieu



Reproduction

‘Les miraculés’

‘the educational
mortality rate’

Les Miraculés

- 1) The miraculé masks the inequalities that are at the heart of the education system.
- 2) The miraculé is simultaneously 'colonized' and removed from a position of resistance.

Implication = no such thing as resilience

Difficult Data

“It was like a door opening, it was so exciting.”

“It was so liberating.”

“It was like flying.”

“It was the first time since I was 19 that I had been defined in my own right, and I found that awe-inspiring.”

Resilient language

“Hope that there was a future. Hope that there was something . . .”

“It’s expanded . . . everything has opened up. That’s what I really do enjoy. And I just feel so privileged. It just amazes. It’s almost like a Disney: star gazing.”

'Real' resilient learners:

Joe

“(I’ve had) what they call spinal fusion. They open you up, right around there. I know I’m being a bit gory; they take your stomach out . . . They made a plastic cast from the waist to the neck. Made out of plastic. Like a suit of armour. You put that on with Velcro. When I had the operation I had to wear that all the time for six months except when I got into bed.”

“That’s when the fear set in, and I said I’m not going and she said, ‘You are going’ . . . And she said to me ‘you go’, and I thought, I’ve got to finish it. Because my wife supported me while I’ve been at college as well.”

Resistance



“One of them actually said to me, ‘you must remember, I am the teacher.’ It is very difficult if they take that stance. You go back to being a child again.”

Resistance/Resilience

“I spoke to a lecturer and I said, ‘don’t you feel that this is not only indefensible, it’s immoral. You’re teaching these children that you can learn about something that is as complex as social exclusion in three and a half days . . .’ This wouldn’t matter, except these children will be in positions of power where they’re making decisions about ordinary people’s lives. That’s immoral.”

How does resilient adult learning work?



Profile of a resilient learner

- She is born in prison.
- Her sibling dies when she is a baby.
- Her father rejects her violently and tries to kill her.
- Her father behaves psychotically towards her mother.
- She is abducted from her mother before she is weaned.
- Her mother becomes missing person.
- She is abandoned as a baby in a dangerous place.
- Her foster carer is killed in front of her.

... subsequently adopted and grows up to be resilient.

Fictional Representation of Resilient Adult Learning (Pygmalion myth)



Theoretical perspectives

Play

The 'feminine' economy

“I came into the unknown
And stayed there unknowing
Rising beyond all science.”

(St John of the Cross, 1578)

Five capabilities of resilient adult learners

- 1) They engage in open readings, resisting closed meanings, and they take a playful approach to language
- 2) They recognize, withstand, and negotiate the tension between inclusion and exclusion
- 3) They show a willingness to divest themselves of their 'clothing' (inherited ways of thinking and artificial concepts) and to try on new clothes

5 capabilities of resilient adult learners

4) They resist passivity by dealing actively with their teachers (for example by finding alternative, unofficial teachers or by subverting the Pygmalion/Galatea relationship)

5) They can be read as *miraculés*, for example, they are open to a kind of resurrection.

The authoritative, single reading

What's wrong with this?



Plural Readings



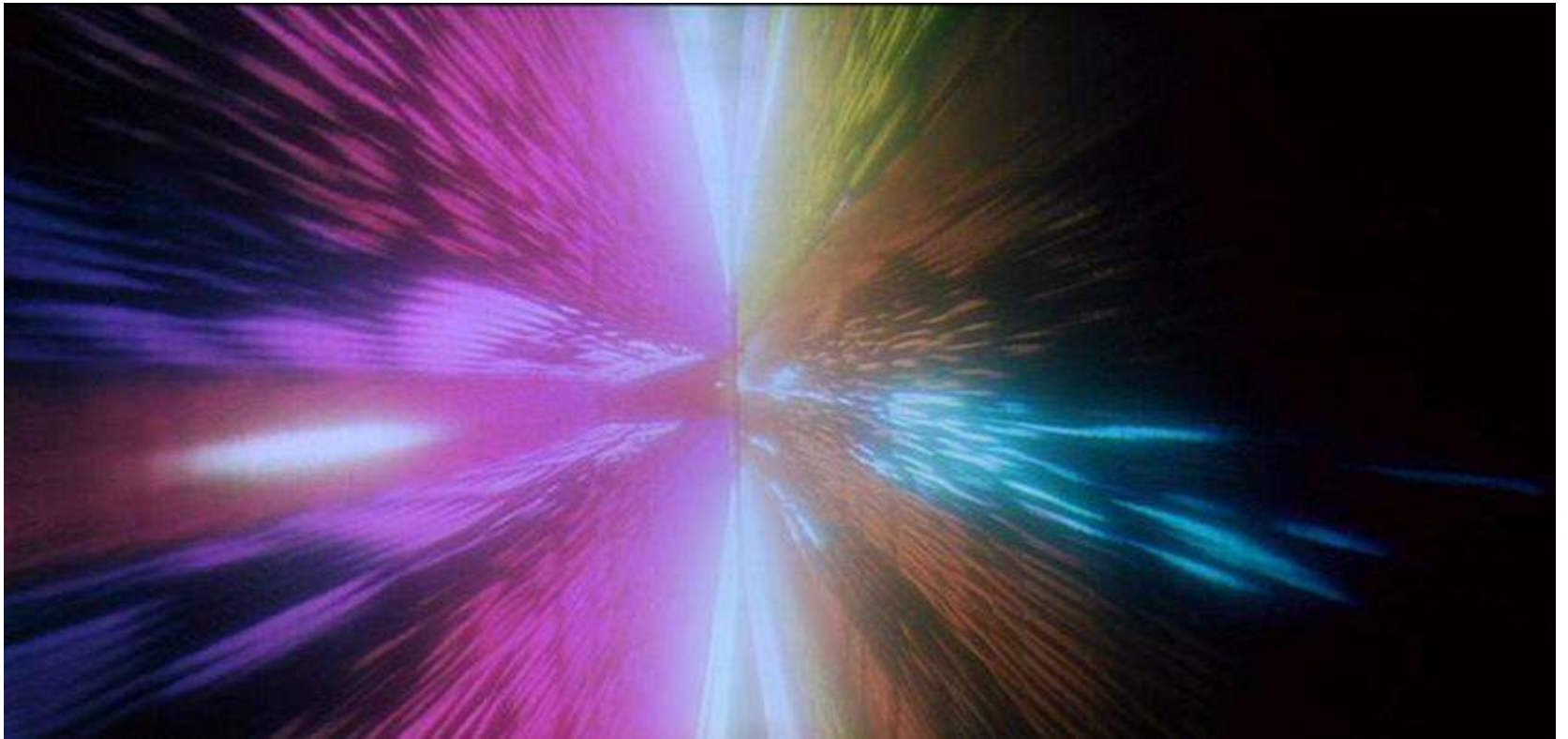
“Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know.”

(Richardson, L. 1997, p.2)

Implications for thinking about resilience

- Not 'in' the learner nor 'in' the teacher nor 'in' the learning environment but constituted in the complex and dynamic interrelationships between all three
- Reading across boundaries and involving one's own story in history (stop objectivising)
- Deliberately flouting the guard rails and the academic barriers
- Stop looking for the 'truth' about resilience which *either* 'internalised' (essentialist) *or* 'responsibilised' (Hart, Gagnon and Cameron', 2015 - performative without recognising context.
- Engage instead in plural and open readings.

In what ways is it possible to read this scene?



Science Fiction

- Not knowing (“I came into the unknown . . .)
- Much more difficult to close down to authoritative, single readings
- Utopian possibilities
- Particularly lends itself to open readings
- Questions ‘common sense’ assumptions of reality and truth
- Allows for discussion about the metaphysical without religion
- Should we make contact with extra-terrestrial life? (In other words, how do I relate the other whom I have not met yet?)

Prison context: emerging questions

- In terms of resilience, does the prison operate like a university (reproduction)?
- If so, do resilient prisoners perform in the same ways that other resilient adult learners do?
- How do resilient adults access resources and capital?
- And how can they help less resilient learners in the prison?

Plural Readings/ Tinkering

Tinker: itinerant mender – a kind of plural reader

“(T)inkering is work that can be found in the specific and constant adjustments, choices of different interventions or uses of technologies initiated by practitioners in their daily interactions with patients, clients and their families or relatives. These continual processes of meticulously exploring options, monitoring or experimenting with different kinds of objects are argued to be the actions that help people to achieve a good quality of life. (Aranda and Hart, 2014, after Mol, 2010)

How do we escape the dominant, static ideologies in thinking about the resilient children and adults with whom we work?

Discussion

In what ways does/could plural reading be a resilience move in your context?

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