

North American Adult Educators:

*Phyllis M. Cunningham Archive
of Quintessential Autobiographies
for the Twenty-First Century*

Keith B. Armstrong, Lee W. Nabb, Anthony P. Czech, editors

Discovery Association Publishing House
Chicago, IL

www.discoveryap.com

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FIRST EDITION

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Discovery Association Publishing House
Chicago, IL

Library of Congress Control Number 2006925488

Armstrong, Keith B., Nabb, Lee W., Czech, Anthony P., editors

North American Adult Educators: Phyllis M. Cunningham archive of quintessential autobiographies for the 21st century/ Keith B. Armstrong, Lee W. Nabb, Anthony P. Czech, editors.

p.cm.

ISBN 1-931967091

1. Autobiographies. 2. Adult Education Archive. 3. Phyllis M. Cunningham. 4. Ronald M. Cervero. 5. Sharan B. Merriam.

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John Arthur Henschke, Ed. D.

I heard someone say it is an inescapable fact that many ordinary people who are not themselves very great nevertheless are used by a great idea. I found myself ultimately moving past my reluctance and then taking responsibility for allowing myself to be used by the idea expressed through the word *andragogy* – *the art and science of helping adults learn*.

Sources That Molded My Life

To me it is a great idea whose time has come, whose hour has struck. It has taken hold of me and used me in molding my life and shaping what I have done in educating adults and helping them learn. Some major elements of andragogy that I include follow.

Central Ideas

First, the potential and ability to learn is in the very nature and personal structure of the adult human being. The propensity, ability, and desire for learning, along with willingness to learn, is there within and is central.

Second, Knowles (1970, 1980) outlined the assumptions and processes of andragogy which I enact and adapt in my adult learning ventures. Assumptions are: The desire, potential, willingness, and ability for self-directedness in learning; the learner's experience is a resource for their own and others' learning; developmental tasks of social roles are crucial in activating the need and readiness for learning; learners need a situation-centered and problem-centered orientation to learning; motivation of an adult's learning is more internal than external; and learners need a reason that makes sense to them as to why they should learn something. Processes are: Preparation, a climate conducive to learning, mutual planning, self-diagnosis of learning needs, dynamic design of a pattern of activities, active involvement in carrying forward the activities, and evaluation or rediagnosis of their learning needs.

Third, the more and better the interaction in a learning experience among the various elements of that setting, the greater the learning is likely to be. Teachers and learners are in a cooperative venture to help the learning take place. Both need to be proactively involved in making that happen. The teacher and learners also involve material resources in some beneficial way to enhance but not be a barrier to the learning.

Fourth, my andragogical conception of preparing educators of adults (which I have used with educational programs in the USA and in many other countries around the world) needs to include at least the following five building blocks: Beliefs and notions about adults as learners, perceptions concerning the qualities of effective teachers, phases and sequences of the learning process, teaching tips and learning techniques, and implementing the prepared plan (Henschke, 1987).

Fifth, in my perception, the adult educator (andragogue) needs additionally to exemplify trust in the potential, ability, desire and willingness of learners to understand and make the right choices in learning. The dimensions of trust at least include: Purposefully communicating to learners that they are each uniquely important; believing learners know what their goals, dreams and realities are like; expressing confidence that learners will develop the skills they need; prizing the learners to learn what is needed; feeling learners' need to be aware of and communicate their thoughts and feelings; enabling learners to evaluate their own progress in learning; hearing learners indicate what their learning needs are; engaging learners in clarifying their own aspirations; developing a supportive relationship with learners; experiencing unconditional positive regard for learners; and respecting the dignity and integrity of learners (Henschke, 1998).

Sixth, my interest in andragogy has taken me into a cooperative research venture (Cooper & Henschke, 2005) to contribute toward expanding and providing a scientific foundation for it as an academic discipline and field of study. Thus far six elements have been identified in this continuing research: Evolution of the term "andragogy"; historical antecedents shaping the concept of andragogy; comparison of the American and European understandings of andragogy; popularizing of the American concept of andragogy; practical applications of andragogy; and theory, research and definition of andragogy.

Seventh, my andragogy website (<http://www.umsl.edu/~henschke/>) includes an extensive section on andragogical papers, my published articles in which most of them are infused with andragogy, an interactive cultural coloring book, my vita, and proceedings from the first andragogy seminar I conducted at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Eighth, I paraphrased a poem by Frost (1995) to depict how andragogy has captivated me:

Andragogy belonged to me before I belonged to Andragogy.
Andragogy was my longing desire in living, teaching and learning
for a few decades
Before I was her educator. Andragogy was mine
In undergraduate school, in graduate school, in theological
seminary, in clinical training, in parish ministry, in doctoral
studies, in university faculty, in consulting with various
organizations throughout society,
But I belonged to Pedagogy, still captive,
Possessing what I still was unpossessed by,
Possessed by what I now no more possessed.
Something I was withholding made me weak
Until I found it was myself
I was withholding from the dynamic, vibrant idea of Andragogy,

And forthwith found new educational and living possibilities
in surrender.
Such as I was I gave myself outright
(The deed of gift was many deeds of dialoguing with others about
Andragogy)
To Andragogy vaguely realizing a new idea embodying teaching,
learning, and living
But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
Such as Andragogy was, such as she will become.

People

The people that have most influenced the molding of my life in general are my parents and extended family. Their beliefs were foundational to me. Nevertheless, ultimately my own beliefs were adapted freely by me and within the situation of my own personal life. My family and I lived in a small rural community. However, we went to church in a town other than where we lived; I went to junior high and high school in a different community; and I worked in banking outside the community where we lived. Thus, relating to multiple contexts allowed me to develop independence in my way of thinking and expression.

When I went into higher education—undergraduate school and graduate school—entering my professional life brought with it freedom and understanding of how to interact with various people and thinking with which I came in contact. A professor in theological seminary, Arnold Schultz, was one I could interact with quite lucidly and I developed my biblical perspectives from his being willing to support my own critical thinking. Malcolm S. Knowles, my first adult educator to work with in depth, introduced me to andragogy and exemplified congruence in theory and practice that made sense to me. What he said and did as a person and an adult educator were consistent. He modeled for me the art and science of helping adults learn, and I bought it hook, line and sinker. Eduard C. Lindeman, through his book *The Meaning of Adult Education*, provided an inspirational vision of the field of adult education. Wendell Smith, a colleague at the University of Missouri, introduced me to adult education in the university and strongly supported my energies in the adult education field. Marcie Boucouvalas and Leo Johnson are my Boston University classmates with whom I have worked in the research and practice of professionally implementing the concept of andragogy in many contexts.

Jost Reischmann, Chair of Andragogy at the University of Bamberg, Germany, has been a close friend and sounding board in my pursuit of the study of andragogy. His website (<http://www.andragogy.net>) has been very beneficial in continual updating of Andragogical and other adult education activities internationally. Mary Cooper, with whom I have pursued the andragogy research, taught me just about everything I know and practice regarding the expanding internet technology relating to implementing our online master's degree at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. When I teach courses online, I still call upon her for help when I get stuck or some new angle on learning technology shows up. Paulette Isaac-Savage is our adult education professor who has expanded the dimension of our degree programs in the direction of minorities, especially African-American, including drawing many of them into our program.

Places

I have been with the University of Missouri as a faculty member for 35 years at the time of this writing. I have had the excitement of working and teaching in adult education at other locations in the USA and in 13 other countries: Brazil, People's Republic of China, South Africa, Thailand, Hong Kong, Slovenia, Germany, United Kingdom, Egypt, Jordan, Cyprus, Canada, and Australia. I have worked with adult educators and adult learners from a total of 74 countries. I participated in the UNESCO Institute of Education (UIE) 1997 World Conference (Confintea V) in Hamburg, Germany, where there were 1,600 adult educators attending from 160 nations. All of these experiences have influenced me profoundly. The main thing I have garnered from this is that adults learn quite the same everywhere around the world. The only difference I detect and have observed is how their learning relates to their context.

How I Came to Adult Education

I have had two major calls upon my life – my first life call into the Christian Ministry, and the second life call into Adult Education. The foundation of my perception of this is found in the Bible, which I believe and have applied personally to my life: Psalm 32: 8 “I [God] will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go; I will guide you with my eye upon you.” I was raised in a Christian home environment with my parents and my two sisters – Joyce and Doris. All of my extended family were (and I currently am) very devout believers and practice our personal faith. We also were involved in a church (Baptist) that was very strong in the idea of the individual person being born again and baptized at the age of what was called accountability – meaning that to become a Christian believer was a matter of a personal choice made freely at an age when one understood what that involves. I became a believer and was baptized by immersion at the age of five and one-half. Incidentally, my decision to become a *Christian* and having a personal relationship with my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, has stayed with me all the subsequent years of my life. However, I have matured, as the years progressed, in my understanding of what that means and how I live my beliefs throughout my daily walk in life.

My father and mother told me that before I was born they prayed to the Lord and dedicated me to the Lord for His Service. It is interesting what influence one's background has on the course of one's life. This same Christian environment in which I was raised emphasized that if one entered into the ministry it was as a result of a personal call from the Lord Jesus Christ. I experienced the first call from the Lord upon my life which was into the Christian ministry in 1949. I subsequently spent nine years in university and seminary academic programs preparing myself to fulfill that call to be a minister. I was duly ordained as a minister in 1954. I met my wife, Carol, during my seminary years, and we were married in June 1958. I was a minister/pastor in local Baptist and Disciples of Christ Churches for 30 years full or part time.

In 1967, I experienced the second call from the Lord upon my life, which was ultimately to bring me into the field of adult education. I then spent six years completing my Doctor of Education academic work in preparation for my career in adult education. My wife, Carol, and our three daughters, Connie, Deanna, and Wendy, were with me and very supportive in this process of preparation. Although not an adult educator, Carol has also

been my best friend, most enthusiastic booster, supporter and encourager in my ministerial and adult education years. At this writing in 2005, I have been a full-time faculty member at the University of Missouri for 35 years – a continuing education specialist and an associate professor of Adult Education. During some of those years, I was also doing part-time pastoral ministry. I thoroughly enjoy my work with adult learners and am exhilarated by the new research findings in which my students and I are constantly involved.

I do not seek to promote my personal Christian beliefs with the students and others with whom I work, but those and my perceptions about the field of adult education are a part of who I am. I will share my beliefs when asked because I am not ashamed of being a person of strong faith and commitment.

What I Gained from Adult Education

I gained a sense of an identity of myself as a professional adult educator (andragogue). I found an important purpose for spending my time and energy in the field of adult education. This also gave direction for my life and the development of integrity for my contribution to others and the society. I have also gained excitement and a real zest for my chosen life aims. The wealth of learning for me as a lifelong learner is priceless. I have received recognition from my educational peers and colleagues and have been honored with various awards for working in the adult education field. Some of them are: Founder's Award, Missouri Valley Adult Education Association, 1995; University of Missouri-St. Louis Chancellor's Award for Excellence to an Academic Non-Regular, 1997; University of Missouri-St. Louis School of Education Alumni Chapter Distinguished Faculty Award, 1997; Induction into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame, 1998; Epsilon Sigma Phi Distinguished Service Award for the State of Missouri, National Extension Honorary Fraternity, 2003; Dean's Award for Lifetime of Service to Education, College of Education, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2004; Malcolm S. Knowles Award for Excellence in Adult Education Program Leadership to the Adult Education Graduate Program at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, 2004; Outstanding Service Medallion Award, American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, 2005.

What Kept Me Firmly Planted in Adult Education

I have stayed firmly planted in adult education because of my enjoyment, the support of my wife and family, freedom to work in the way I see fit, institutional backing, fruitful interaction with adult education colleagues, and international work – finding out that learners are learners and their learning process is very similar no matter where in the world is their background. I have worked with adult learners in 13 countries and from a total of 74 countries. It is part of my purpose in life and one of the calls upon my life. It is an exciting field of study in which to be. I have been delighted to see numerous people graduated from our adult education master's, Ed. D., and Ph. D. academic programs. They have flourished in their professional careers, and that helps to spur me to continue in adult education.

I have sought to contribute to our field of adult education and have been involved as an officer in various adult education organizations: President of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE); Director of the Commission on International

Adult Education (CIAE) of AAACE; President of the Missouri Valley Adult Education Association (MVAEA); President of the Missouri, USA / Para, Brazil (MO/PA) Partners of the Americas; Historian of the Missouri Association for Adult Continuing and Community Education (MAACCE); and Chair of the St. Louis, MO, Adult Education Council (AEC/STL). I have not found a field of study that would command my energies or is as interesting to me as adult education. My professional growth, maturing, development, and learning needs have been met and are very satisfying in adult education. I also have been able to support my family in this professional career. I receive a great delight in working in this field as I keep growing, developing, learning, maturing and eagerly moving toward a bright future. I invite others to join in this exciting and adventurous adult education field.

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