

DIALOGUES IN ANDRAGOGY

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(PRELIMINARY COMMENTS.. What follows are the basic comments I made to the Dialogues in Andragogy Seminar April 29, 2000. The comments arose out of questions Asked by the class)

INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to have the opportunity to spend some time with my learning colleagues in the field of Adult Learning. Not only is the field of adult learning central to my life's work, it is always exciting to engage with others in areas of inquiry around such an exciting field of study and practice. Often times when people ask me what business I am in, I will respond that I am in the Adult Learning business. I have been so engaged for over 40 years. When my colleague Dr. John Henschke told me about his plans to conduct the seminar in which you people are engaged and asked me if there would be any possibility of my being involved, I jumped at the chance. Not only just to be able to spend some time with him; but to also engage others in the pursuit of additional learning about what the "Andragogical" process is all about.

I want to thank Rudi for sending me the questions you have invited me to respond too. I have had a lot of fun working with them and am hopeful that some additional insights, confirmations and even differences might emerge as we meet together today. I have to admit that I find the questions intriguing and also quite challenging. I am not sure how much justice I will be able to do to the questions. I do hope my responses can stimulate some continuing discussion.

QUESTION NUMBER 1 "FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE WHAT IS ANDRAGOGY, HOW DO YOU PRACTICE IT?"

IN ANSWERING THIS QUESTION (ESPECIALLY THE FIRST PART) I HAVE DELIBERATELY CHOSEN NOT TO REFERENCE DEFINITIONS FROM THE LITERATURE. FOR EXAMPLE, MALCOLM KNOWLES (AND OTHERS) HAVE REASONABLY EXTENSIVE DEFINITIONS. SINCE MY INTRODUCTION TO THE FIELD WAS LARGELY THROUGH WORK WITH MALCOLM, WHAT HE ESPOUSED BOTH IN TERMS OF DEFINITION AND PRACTICE HAS HAD A SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE ON MY PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE.

FOR ME, ANDRAGOGY IS AN APPROACH TO LEARNING WHICH FOCUSES PRIMARILY ON THE NEEDS OF LEARNERS AS THEY SEEK WAYS OF FINDING MEANING IN THEIR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIVES. WHILE THE PRIMARY WORK WITH ANDRAGOGY IS WITH ADULT LEARNERS, I DO BELIEVE THAT A LOT OF THE PRINCIPLES CAN BE APPLIED TO PEOPLE YOUNGER THAN ADULTS.

ANDRAGOGY IS ROOTED IN A FUNDAMENTAL SET OF VALUES THAT ARE GROUNDED IN ADULT DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES, WHICH AT THE VERY CORE HAS THE INTERESTS OF THE LEARNER AT ITS CENTER. IT ALSO INVOLVES A SET OF PRINCIPLES WHICH HONOR THE LEARNER'S EXPERIENCE AS CENTRAL TO THE PROCESS OF LEARNING.

BUILT INTO THE ANDRAGOGICAL PROCESS IS A METHOD FOR ENGAGING LEARNERS IN A DISCOVERY OF MEANING FOR THEM; WHATEVER THE FOCUS OF THE LEARNING MIGHT BE.

HOW HAVE I PRACTICED ANDRAGOGY?

I WANT TO IDENTIFY A NUMBER OF EXPERIENCES I HAVE HAD OVER THE LAST 35 YEARS.

PROJECT 50

In 1963, the National Council of the YMCA launched an experimental program where the focus was going to be in developing programs geared to meet the needs of young adults (18-24). Fifty YMCA's around the country were identified as ones who would carry out the experiment. Twenty-five of the YMCA's were given "packaged" programs i.e. coffee houses or service corps type activities. The others were asked to free-wheel; come up with different approaches. I was the "project director" for the Greater Boston YMCA's entry into the experiment. We decided on the experimental. Malcolm Knowles was the lay-chairman of the committee directing the project.

At about the same time, the Federal College Work Study program was initiated. My job at the YMCA included coordinating the YMCA's involvement with local colleges and universities. We developed "off-campus" contracts where students who qualified were placed in local Y's. Students were supposed to be placed in jobs "congruent" with their study area at the local college/university. We had contracts with over 30 colleges. We decided that instead of trying to go out into the university communities and determine what some of their needs might be that we would "hire" the students to do that in a rather unique way. I asked several of the Work-Study Coordinators to send me a number of students that no one else would hire--because of the difficult fit between area of study and job possibilities. I would then ask them to tell me what they were interested in doing re: social action projects, personal/professional goals, ideas for changes needed in the community etc. Once defined, then their job was to come up with a plan and series of activities that would work toward dealing with those concerns.

From my point of view the driving force behind that whole project were andragogical principles. (Examples will be offered--as well as outcomes).

YMCA TRAINING

For nearly ten years, while still at the Greater Boston YMCA, I was responsible for coordinating training of program and executive staff as well as laymen in matters of lay-staff relations; leadership and management training; program design. This meant that numerous training programs were developed, designed, and delivered. These events were planned, largely, around the use of the Adult Learning Methods identified by Malcolm.

CREATION OF COMPETENCY MODELS

Since 1968 I have been involved in the creation of several competency models which grow out of exploring ways to help adults identify their needs; which in turn can be helpful in designing training and development (or curriculum) decisions. In 1969, we created a YMCA Career Development Competency guide which was used nationally for

nearly 10 years. Additional competency models included a large electric power service company (responsible for distribution of most of the electrical power for the New England States) which was in need of a major Leadership Development program and another one for a large division of Massachusetts Eye and Ear Hospital (MGH). Most recently a competency model has been created for Doctoral students at the Fielding Institute; focusing primarily on Research Competencies. The structure as suggested by Malcolm has been the focal point of the creation of the models. (If need be, I can elaborate on that).

HEALTH CARE

For six years, (1975-81), I was involved with Babson College's School of Continuing Management Education where I was responsible for co-ordinating Babson's work with Health Care systems. This included initially work with the creation of training programs in Nursing Home Administration. Using andragogy as the model for developing, designing and delivering programs to prepare administrators for licensure as well as renewal was central to the process. Later similar programs in working with Dentists and Doctors as well as numerous leadership training programs for local hospitals.

CORPORATE TRAINING SEMINARS

Since 1978, I have been involved in developing or facilitating seminars designed to meet some of the needs of Corporate Client Systems. In some instances the courses were designed by people other than myself. These included work in the area of Positive Power and Influence and Negotiation. In each case a major part of the design centers around the practice of andragogy--especially a large segment around self-directed learning. Dozens of companies were involved with who knows how many participants.

In addition to the above, I have created several courses/ workshops/seminars in which the philosophy and methods of andragogy were central. These include: Stress Management, Understanding and Managing Conflict (the last 15 years), Leadership Development, Team Building, Designing Whole Brain Learning Programs, and training projects aimed at technically oriented people (accountants and IT).

MEMBER OF COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY FACULTY

Taught part-time at a number of Boston area colleges and universities and both the undergraduate and graduate level in which the basics of andragogy were used. Included were courses in Community Development, Leadership Development and a project based Master's level program through Springfield College.

INTERNATIONAL WORK

In the mid-seventies, I was involved in helping the Republic of China YMCA's establish a non-formal adult education program for the six principal YMCA's on the

Island. This involved doing an extensive needs analysis and helping them design programs which were culture specific and applied the Assumptions and Processes of Andragogy to Taiwanese culture.

THE FIELDING INSTITUTE

For the past 18 years I have worked as a core faculty member in the Human and Organization Development Program at The Fielding Institute, Santa, Barbara, California. Fielding is a fully accredited, Ph.D. granting institution. We identify ourselves as being engaged in Distributed Learning, networked based and external degree in operation. Fielding has been in existence over 25 years. The HOD program has been in existence 20 years. We currently have around 450 students and a faculty of over 25 including full-time; part-time and adjunct. Degree are also granted in Clinical Psychology and Education, Leadership and Change. An on-line Master's level program in Organization Design and Effectiveness is also offered.

The founders of Fielding were influenced in their development by Malcolm Knowles' approach to Adult Learning. Learners range in age from the late 20's to early to mid-seventies. Average age is about 40. The larger percentage of the learners are mid-career adults. The members of the learning community cover all of the US states and a number of countries outside the US.

Fielding operates in a self-directed mode. To graduate the learner has to complete 8 Knowledge Area Assessments, a Comprehensive Assessment and a Dissertation. Faculty serve as either Mentors, Faculty Readers or Research Consultants. The individual, once accepted in the program, attends an Orientation and Planning Session. This is the only "required" part of the program. This is one week in length. At the session the learner identifies a member of the faculty they would like to work with as their mentor. The mentor then guides them through the creation of a learning plan, and the creation of initial Assessment Contracts. These were influenced significantly by Malcolm's approach to Contract Learning.

During my 18 years on the faculty I have served as the Dissertation Chair (and Mentor) for over 40 students. I have 8-10 more "in-the pipeline" to graduate before I retire next January. The model I have used in guiding these learners through the program is the Andragogical model. In addition to being the chair of these student's committee, I have been a faculty reader on an additional 80 or more dissertation committees.

A significant part of the Fielding work, which clearly ties into andragogical practice is the guiding of learners through Knowledge Area assessments. I have assessed in excess of 500 students in Knowledge areas including: Human Development, Social Psychology, Management and Leadership, Organization Theory and Human Learning and Motivation. An important part of this process is helping the learner define what it is they want to learn in keeping with the parameters of the respective disciplines.

As a part of our program we have two annual national sessions where, in addition to meeting with faculty, the learners can attend workshops/seminars and consultations presented by faculty and faculty/students together. These sessions are designed around adult learning methods. I have conducted in excess of 100 such sessions over the past 18 years. The sessions are scheduled for from one-half day to three days in length.

Another part of our program is to do, with the learners, portfolio reviews and academic reviews. These are done on a periodic basis to be sure that the learner is getting what they want from the program and that they are progressing toward the completion of the dissertation by "mastering" appropriate competencies. (If desired, I can explain how these work)

QUESTION 2 WHAT IS MY VIEW OF ANDRAGOGY AND HOW DID I DEVELOP MY CURRENT POSITION?

I see Andragogy as being an Adult Learning method which is theoretically grounded and reinforced by practice. I developed my perspective through several years of study with Malcolm Knowles (and others) and through a lot of independent reading. The practical application of the theory in my personal and professional life has given me additional support for what I think is a very positive and meaningful way of work with adult learners.

NOTIONS ABOUT THEORY.

I am aware that there is debate among adult educators as to whether or not andragogy is (or has) a theory. Where I come out is yes there is a theory base to a andragogy. Let me offer some definitions which frame my positions:

From Bernard Weiner (HUMAN MOTIVATION, METAPHORS, THEORIES AND RESEARCH, SAGE 1992) says a theory involves "...developing a language, an explanatory system, a conceptual representation or what is more commonly termed a theory. that is applicable across many domains of behavior and explains why behavior is initiated, sustained, directed and so forth..." pp2-3 Weiner, Human Motivation--Sage Pubs 1992

From Shapiro and Bentz--(MINDFUL INQUIRY IN SOCIAL RESEARCH -- 1998) :
"Theory is a distilled form of existing ;knowledge in the social and human sciences. It brings into coherent form the concepts; and principles used in the explanation and conceptual organization of reality. In a sense, a main purpose of all inquiry is the validation, revision, renewal, or creation of theory. Of course, theory is and should be related to practice; however, without theory, any given practice is lost in history without becoming a part of the cumulative wisdom embodied in theory. P 140

From Morton Deutsch. THEORIES IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY, Basic Books, 1965: " A theory will be fruitful to the extent that it contains constructs that meet the requirements of (1) logical fertility (such constructs enable logical inferences to be

made), (2) multiple connections (the constructs are not isolated from one another but, rather, are so richly interconnected that it is possible to go from one to another by various routes), and (3) empirical extensibility (some of the constructs can be related to observables in such a way that a variety of equivalent empirical definitions can be given to any specific construct.

From Malcolm: THE MAKING OF AN ADULT EDUCATOR, JOSSEY BASS , 1989 " A criticism that has been leveled against andragogy several times is that it is not a theory. My problem with this is that in the social science literature there appears to be little agreement as to the meaning of the word theory. Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary gives two definitions that apply to this kind of situation: (1) the analysis of a set of facts in their relation to one another" (2) A belief, policy, or procedure proposed or followed as the basis of action." I believe that andragogy qualifies as a theory according to both definitions. However, I prefer to think of it as a model of assumptions about learning or a conceptual framework that serves as a basis for an emergent theory. p 112.

From what I understand about andragogy, I would say that given most, if not all of the definitions offered above that andragogy could qualify as a theory and I believe, further, that when applied to most adult learning situations it is a method which clearly enhances adult learning