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Volume 9, Number 3  
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The Modeling Principle

Teaching Teachers

Using Experience in Professional

Transformation

# ADULT LEARNING

Spring 1998

Volume 9, Number 3

## THE TRAINING OF ADULT EDUCATORS

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# Modeling the Preparation of Adult Educators

By John A. Henschke

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hen we say "adult educators," we may indicate a broader range of individuals than one would think upon first consid-

eration. If adult educators are people who "help adults learn," then their ranks must include: (1) leaders in voluntary associations; (2) executives, training officers, supervisors and foremen in corporations; (3) teachers, administrators and group leaders in various educational institutions; and (4) program directors, writers and editors in educational areas of mass media; as well as (5) professional adult educators who have been prepared specifically for this vocation and make it their permanent career.

Other than those in the last group, most of the "adult educators" mentioned above have had little or no formal instruction to prepare them to "help adults learn." Some may have attended a preparatory workshop designed to help them understand how to teach adults. Others may have studied a book such as Robinson's *Introduction to Helping Adults Learn and Change* or Renner's *Instructor's Survival Kit*, or any of a number of quick learn-as-you-go guides.

Available to all "adult educators" are graduate courses and formal master's and doctoral programs in adult education. There are also programs of preservice

training for adult educators: training for part-time instructional staff, paraprofessional instructors of adults and volunteers; and continuing education in the professions. There is training in organizations; training of consultants; training in business and industry; and training of human resources development specialists. All of these approaches feature one or more persons who conduct preparatory activities with emerging educators of adults.

## The Modeling Principle

Each of the above mentioned approaches to adult education has a unique validity. Yet I have observed, in almost a quarter of a century of preparing adult educators to help adults learn, that the validity of teaching ultimately derives from a single element: modeling.

Modeling, according to the dictionary, means providing an example worthy of imitation, a standard by which a thing can be measured. For an educator, that means exemplifying the lessons being taught. It means walking what you talk, not "Do as I say, not as I do."

If we look to ancient times, we may find Moses as a model prophet and law giver, Confucius as a model thinker, Abraham as a model of faith, Socrates as a model questioner, Jesus Christ as a model of forgiving

John A. Henschke is past-president of AAACE and associate professor of Education at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

love, and Tullius Cicero as a model of eloquent oratory. Their personal influence is still pervasive in our time.

If we review the history of our nation, we may find George Washington to be a model of prudence, integrity and patriotism; Thomas Jefferson to be a model of learnedness; Teddy Roosevelt to be a model of courage, and Abraham Lincoln to be a model of honesty and justice. And we can see how their modeling of these virtues has helped shape the world we live in—as clearly as we can see their images carved into Mt. Rushmore.

As adult educators, we are models. Students learn more from our actions than our words. They want to see if our actions match our words. With this in mind, if we believe that adults learn in a certain way, then it follows that we take it upon ourselves to model the conduct and attitude that demonstrate and support what we're trying to teach them.

A guiding principle and statement in the University of Missouri-St. Louis, School of Education is: "If I am not modeling what I am teaching, I am teaching something else." One could also say: "If I am modeling what I am teaching, I am teaching what I am modeling." This principle is much like that of the Zaddik Rabbi, who says the personality of the teacher takes the place of the teaching—she or he is the teaching. For us, whose task is to help other adults learn, it means risking being ourselves, trusting our feelings and acting on them, thereby engaging a like commitment from our students.

### **An Outline for Modeling**

There are certain ingredients that go into the making of a model. Understanding each of these ingredients can help us in our practice of modeling in the preparation of adult educators.

*Andragogy.* One ingredient is the theory of andragogy—the art and science of helping adults learn. Its primary principle is the desire, potential and ability for self-directedness on the part of the learner. Other principles include: perceiving the learner's

experience as a resource for learning, seeing developmental tasks of social roles as crucial in activating the need and readiness for learning, learners need a situation-centered or problem-centered orientation to learning, understanding that motivation of adult learners is internal rather than merely external, and learners need a valid reason why they need to learn something to appreciate its importance.



**As adult educators, we are models.  
Students learn more from our  
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I experienced these principles of andragogy in my studies at Boston University with Malcolm Knowles, who popularized the theory in the United States and has now passed the torch of leadership (modeling) in adult education to our generation. I've heard people say that Malcolm provided a set of injunctions from which we will gain benefit if we follow them, and that if a teacher has some notion of what Knowles is talking about, both learner and teacher will greatly benefit in a learning situation.

I have implemented these principles of andragogy in my own teaching of adult education and in working with master's and doctoral students at University of Missouri-St. Louis. Teaching the way I was taught has worked well for me, as I have seen many adult educators blossom and flourish in their research and practice.

Eduard Lindeman said that andragogy is the true method by which adults keep themselves intelligent about the modern world, and that its use would make a qualitative difference in the life of our time. He further

asserted the practical nature of andragogy: theory becomes fact, and words become responsible acts and accountable deeds.

*Attitude.* A second ingredient is attitude. Someone said that if andragogy is used only as a method for conducting learning activities, it may become mechanical and lose its dynamism. Andragogy is more than mere method; it is an attitude of mind and heart, and it becomes a transforming power and positive influence in modeling the preparation of adult educators. An attitude of caring for the learner as a valuable, unique person, and of helping the learner to accomplish his or her educational goals, is essential for an adult educator; it is like the warp and woof of an exquisitely beautiful cloth weaving.

*Congruence.* A third ingredient is congruence. In mathematics, if two numbers give the same remainder when divided by a given value, they are said to be congruent. In adult education, if we apply our andragogical principles consistently, we will achieve congruence with learners in the form of a mutual agreement of voluntary conformity. For that to happen, we must have congruence between theory and practice, even though we may think that's not very scholarly. Congruence of theory and practice need to be like two geometric figures exactly superimposed on one another, or like an architectural plan for a building and the actual building.

*Trust.* A fourth ingredient is trust. To be effective, an adult educator needs to have trust in the ability and potential of learners (emerging adult educators) to understand the learning process and make the right choices. Trust takes the form of:

- 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.

The adult educator must initiate trust with learners. If he or she effectively models the principles of adult education, learners have a golden opportunity to become great adult educators themselves. If trusted, the learners may learn something, which otherwise, they would have learned less well, more slowly, or not at all. A lack of trust seriously hampers the learning process.

## The adult educator must initiate trust with learners.

### Building blocks

I like to encourage emerging adult educators to focus on five building blocks: (1) beliefs and notions about adults as learners; (2) perceptions concerning the qualities of effective teachers/facilitators; (3) phases and sequences of learning process (theory of how learning takes place); (4) teaching tips and learning techniques; and, (5) implementation of the prepared plan. Modeling—*andragogy, attitude, congruence, and trust*—while using these building blocks, helps to move the preparation of adult educators full circle from concept to reality.

### Summary

You may wish to incorporate other ingredients as part of modeling the preparation of adult educators—based on your experience, someone else's experience, or an interesting theory you've heard. In any case, my observations tell me that the aforementioned ingredients—*andragogy, attitude, congruence, and trust*—are basic considerations. I have found that it is possible to be yourself and to be congruent in a university setting without sacrificing academic quality or rigor. I have found this to be true in varying time-frames within non-academic settings as well, meaning that all people who "help adults learn"—not just professional adult educators—can use the modeling principle in the preparation of adult educators.

I agree with an adult educator friend of mine who said that if we model this thing we are talking about, we are going to get it right yet.

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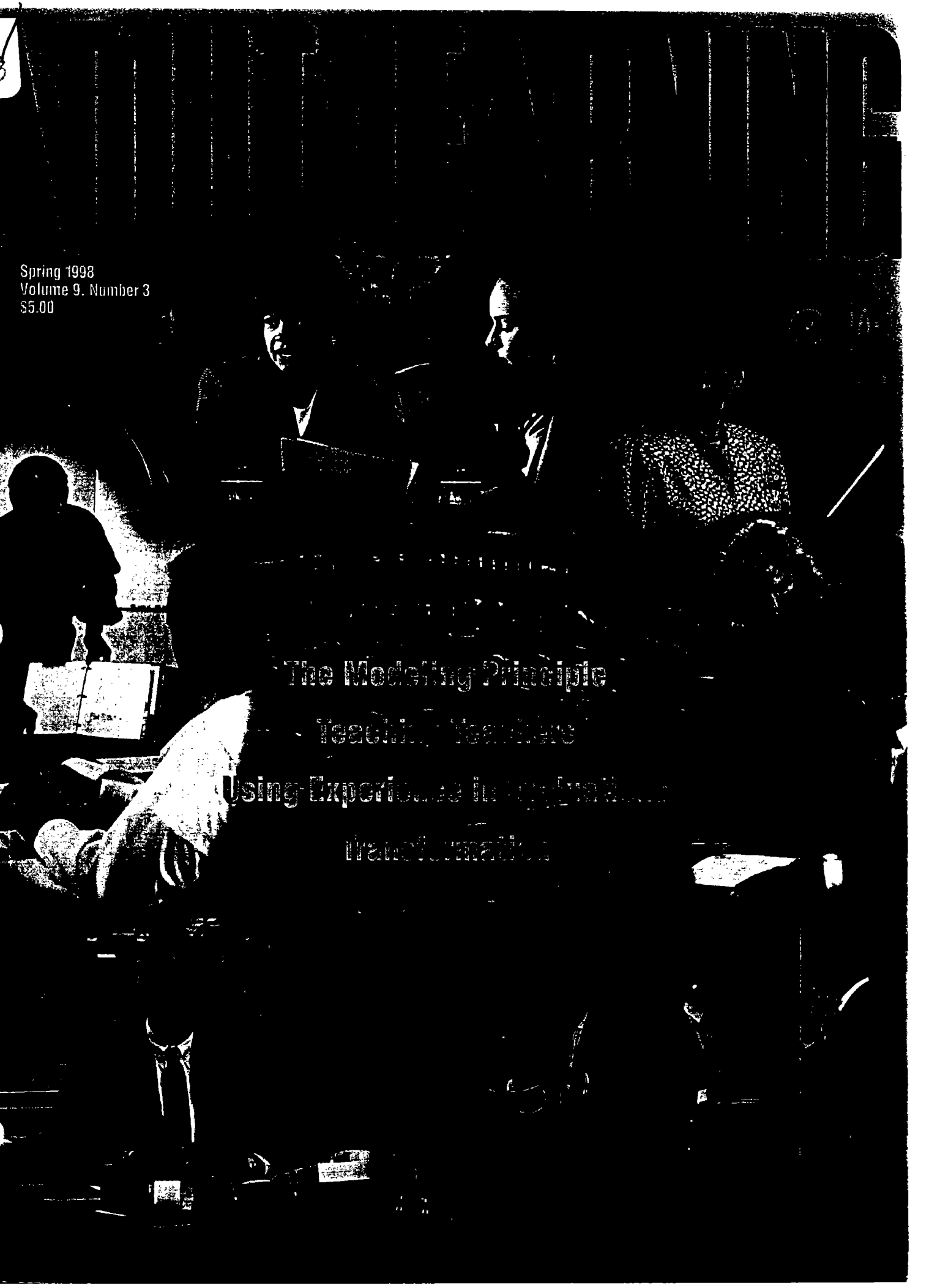
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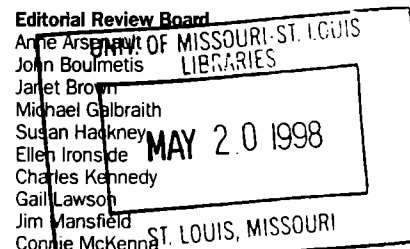
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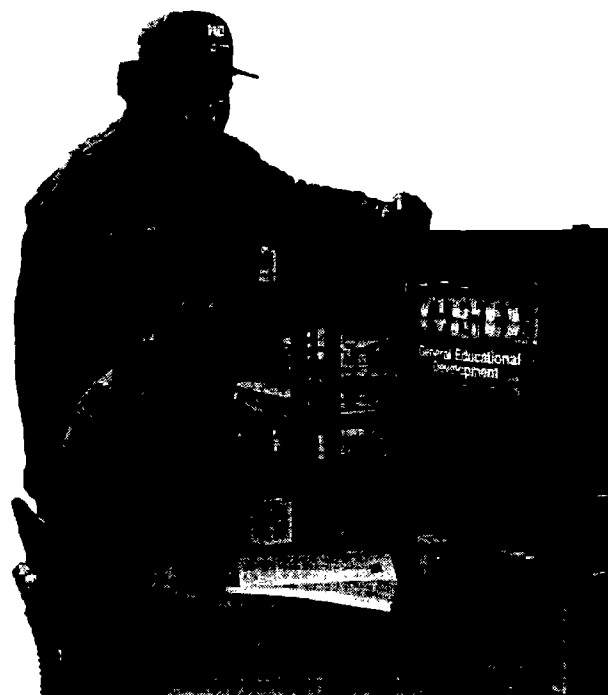
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