

From Monologue to Dialogue: Enhancing the Teaching/ Learning Process Through Adult Education

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Fred Milacci
Liberty University



Introduction

- My Story
 - ✓ The perks of being 50—almost!
 - ✓ How I got here
- Jesus, the Master Teacher
- A Clarification . . . Upfront!



What is “Adult Education”?

Discovering the answer is a two-pronged process:

1. First, we must (attempt to) define the term, “adult education”
2. Then, we must define or describe the field/scope of adult education



Defining the Term

Begins by addressing the following:

- What do we mean by “adult?”
- What is our understanding or definition of “education?”



What do we mean by

- a. Is anyone over 18 an adult?
- b. Is a 20 year old attending college full-time more an "adult" than an 18-year-old working full-time?
- c. How about the 16-year-old single mother working on a GED at night? Is she an adult or a non-adult?
- d. Does being an adult require that one is carrying out the social roles of adulthood?



What is education?

Questions to be addressed:

- a. Is education the same as schooling?
- b. How does education compare with “learning?”
- c. Is education always formal or can it occur non-formally?
- d. What about independent study or self-directed learning: do they qualify as education?



(Towards) Defining the Term

Generally speaking, adult education . . .

- Is a field of practice, research, and scholarship
- Fosters an understanding of the different ways in which adults learn and the different ways they may be helped to learn



(Towards) Defining the

Though no single consensus regarding a definition of the term adult education exists . . .

There are commonalities among definitions such as:

- ✓ The adult status/roles of the learners
- ✓ The notion that the activity is purposeful or planned



(Towards) Defining the Term

- “All the activities with an educational purpose that are carried on by people, engaged in the ordinary business of life” (Bryson, 1936, p. 3).



(Towards) Defining the

- Adult education is a process whereby persons whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status undertake systematic, and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, or skills” (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 9).



(Towards) Defining the

- “[A process by which adults] alone, in groups, or in institutional settings. . . . improve themselves or their society” (Houle, 1972, p. 32).



(Towards) Defining the Term

- “Activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults” (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p. 8).



Related Terms/Concepts

- Continuing Education
- Lifelong Learning
- Community Education
- Open Learning (UK)
- Popular Education
(Latin America/Europe)



Defining the Field (i.e.

- Adult Religious Education
- Adult Literacy
- ABE
- HRD
- Workplace Learning
- Community Action/
Development
- Community College
Practice



Defining the Field (i.e.

- Continuing Professional Education
- Adult Correctional Education
- Cooperative Extension
- ESL
- Higher Education
- Military Continuing Education
- Distance Learning



Key Concepts in Adult

- Andragogy
 - ✓ Coined and developed by Malcolm Knowles (1970)
 - ✓ Generally defined as the art and science of helping adults learn
 - ✓ Contrasted with pedagogy (i.e. how children learn)
 - ✓ Follows prescriptive guidelines
 - ✓ More recently, concept debated/criticized in academic adult education



Key Concepts in Adult

- Self-directed learning
 - ✓ Developed by Houle, Tough, & Knowles
 - ✓ Defined as the learner choosing to assume the primary responsibility for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their learning experiences (Caffarella, 1993)



Key Concepts in Adult

- Adult Development
 - ✓ Offers a developmental perspective on how to approach and understand adult teaching and learning (Tennant & Pogson, 1995, p. x1)
 - ✓ Argues that understanding issues & dilemmas of adult development can inform adult educational practice
 - ✓ Broadly speaking two types of adult development theories exist:
 - o Emphasis on phases or seasons



Key Concepts in Adult

- Program
- Facilitator
- Learner
- Practitioner



Fundamental* Assumptions in Adult Education

*i.e. as defined by me



Assumptions about Adult

- Adults generally desire to take more control over their learning than youth
- Adults draw upon their experiences as a resource in their learning efforts more than youth
- Adults tend to be more motivated in learning situations than youth



Assumptions about Adult

- Adults are more pragmatic in learning than youth
- In contrast to youth, the learner role is secondary for adults
- Adults must fit their learning into life's "margins"
- Many adults lack confidence in their learning



Assumptions about Adult

- Adults are more resistant to change than youth
- Adults are more diverse than youth
- Adults must compensate for aging in learning



Assumptions about

Central to adult education is the desire to create an environment for learning

As an instructor, I do not teach lessons or content; I teach people

Generally speaking, adult educators view their work as a vocation, their mission and/or calling
(Collins, 1991; Milacci, 2003)



Assumptions about

To be effective, the adult educator (i.e. teacher) must recognize the importance of the teaching context/ situation

“Effective teachers improvise. They hone a rich repertoire of knowledge and skills, but they also know that their knowledge and skills cannot be applied formulaically. They know that in order to be effective they must tailor their expertise to particular [teaching] situations” (Baptiste, 2003, p. 1).



Assumptions about Teaching

The collective experiences of learners are as much a source of knowledge as course content (i.e. lectures, readings, etc.)

Being a subject-matter-expert (SME—pronounced “smee”) is not synonymous with being a good teacher



Assumptions about

To be an effective teacher of adults, I must be willing to . . .

- ✓ Regularly reflect on the “nuts and bolts” of the entire teaching/learning process or transaction
- ✓ Change, to improve, to get out of my rut or “teaching comfort zone,” and evolve into a better learner—and subsequently, a better teacher



Assumptions about

Adult learning is better facilitated through dialogue* . . .

- Uses a problem-posing approach to teaching/learning (“guide on the side”)
- Contrasted with monologue* which uses a banking approach to teaching/learning (“sage on a stage”)
- Distinguishes between learning that is teacher-centered, learner-centered, and learning



Assumptions about Teaching

Adult learning is better facilitated through dialogue (cont.) . . .

- Recognizes—and attempts to close—the distance between professor (i.e. teacher) & learner
- Exists not only between teacher & student but among students as well
- Utilizes needs assessments to involve learners in identifying what is to be learned (Vella, 2002, p. 5).



Assumptions about Teaching

Adult learning is better facilitated through dialogue (cont.) . . .

- Appreciates the value of and relies on questions/questioning, particularly open-ended (as contrasted with closed) questions
- Strives to create and maintain a safe learning environment



Adult Education Today . . .

Is a field in transition, searching for identity and direction, dealing with complex questions such as . . .

- Should the field return to its historic roots/heritage of social change?
- What role—if any—should professionalization play in the discipline?
- Do we need to generate new adult education theory (in order to be considered a “legitimate” academic discipline)?
- How do we balance/handle the (age old) tension between academic adult



Adult Education Today

Some current issues in the field include:

- The role/place of spirituality in adult education (see English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; English & Gillen, 2000; Milacci, 2003; Tisdell, 2003)
- A (sometimes heated) debate on HRD, work and learning, workplace training, etc.
- The use/abuse of educational technology & techniques (value-laden or value-less?)
- The stated and unstated goals behind lifelong learning, such as:
 - ✓ Lifelong learning . . .for what?
 - ✓ Lifelong learning . . .for whom?



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