ANDRAGOGY IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL: A REFLECTIVE PAUSE

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Introduction

Through my studies within the field of adult education, I have come to sense a general attitude, or perception by adult educators, and those involved in adult education that adolescent and adult educations are mutually exclusive. As my previous studies were in the field of secondary education, and having sat behind the same desks as adolescent of year eleven and twelve, as a mature age senior student I find this concept educationally short sighted and of great concern. In order to assure myself that adolescents can benefit from adult education methodology, a master's study was initiated in May 1997 to investigating the feasibility of implementing adult educational methodology within the senior secondary school. This paper considers my literature search thus far as to whether late adolescents have the potential to benefit from adult education methodology. Considering the nature of education, adult education, what is an adult, and do adolescent have the "right stuff" to engage, namely: a mature self-concept, and the appropriate cognitive ability.

Education

The study of education tends to define, encapsulate, categorise, and pigeonhole education, placing limitations on its boundaries. Education is a relative term, possessing characteristics of variation in meaning within time and space, which is demonstrated within the literature by: attempts to find an overall definition (Finch and Crunkilton, 1993; Gutek, 1988; Knight, 1980; Peters, 1996; and Rogers, 1993), various types of education: pedagogical, andragogical, vocational, competence-based, lifelong, recurrent and community, and varying educational providers (agents): independent education organisations, educational institutions, quasi-educational organisations, and noneducational organisations (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991). This seemingly measureless expanse of education cannot be encapsulated within one definition, but incorporates many elements or sub-definitions. Sub-definition is the infrastructure that fashions the overall definition. Winch (1996) cites two types of educational definitions: (1) selective, those "drawing on a preferred subset of uses of the term which expresses the concept"; and (2) prescriptive, how the philosopher considers the term should be used, either: liberal conception; placing "value on personal development as a desirable end in itself"; and instrumental conception; placing "value on education for the extrinsic purpose for which it may be used"(p.25). The above implies that no one definition can encapsulate the term education, and that the seeking of a definition for education is a complex process. Therefore, to initiate this discussion on education, a liberal conceptional prescriptive definition will be
used as a guidepost along the journey toward greater understanding of education itself. To this end, the author initiates a guidepost with the following definition by Laska (1976, in Knight 1980), which is presented as a definition, not the definition, if one exists at all:

The deliberate attempt by the learner or by someone else to control (or guide, or direct, or influence, or manage) a learning situation in order to bring about the attainment of a desired learning outcome (goal) (p 10).

When the word "education" is mentioned, most individuals develop associations with schooling, which is institutional learning where students and teachers operate within prescribed boundaries (Knight 1980, Rogers 1993). The definition above shows that the scope of education goes far beyond schooling, and is purposeful. Knight (1980) considers learning as a lifelong process that leads to new or changed behaviour, and therefore is also not restricted to schooling. Learning can take many forms: incidental learning; learning that occurs through everyday interaction between an individual and the randomness of life (Candy 1991); informal learning; unintentional learning that is generated from purposeful social integration, e.g.: volunteer work in a hospital, babysitting, taking a summer vacation in Europe, and waiting on tables (Finch and Crunkilton, 1993), and intentional learning; learning that is initiated to achieve a predetermined goal or learning objective. Intentional learning is normally associated with education (Candy 1991, Laska 1976). Knight (1980) classifies education as a subset of learning. Education and learning occur in many circumstances and contexts. Education develops understanding that grows "as one is led to think reflectively about cause and effect relationships" (Knight 1980, p.11). Snook (1973, in Harris 1995) describes education as preparing individuals for life in a broad and inclusive sense. Education as Harris (1995) contends is designed to give learners a holistic learning experience, which is also aimed at preparation for vocational opportunity. Lawson (1982) is steadfast in claiming that education is value laden.

The above has argued that education encompasses: intentional learning, a controlled and planned process leading to a purposeful outcome(s), value laden in process and outcomes, furnishes learners with a holistic learning experience, and prepares learners for vocational opportunities. Yet who decides what is of value, what controls are used, what constitutes the holistic experiences, what experiences is appropriate, what is to be incorporated within each experience, and who should be involved in the experience of education? The answer to these questions is found in educational philosophy. Therefore, the designing of a particular educational model is based on a particular educational theory of practice which is determined by its adopted educational philosophy.

**Educational Philosophy**

Of the many philosophical approaches to understanding our universe, and humankind's relationship to this universe, four philosophical approaches form the
bases from which most of the others are derived, they are: Idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, and Existentialism. These four philosophical approaches are important for three reasons: (1) their profound effect on education (Samuelson and Markowitz, 1938), (2) they form the bases for most of the educational theories in use today (Knight, 1980), and (3) they form the bases of other philosophical disciplines, e.g. Realism-Thomism. Philosophy in its broadest sense is the pursuit of wisdom, and this pursuit has three dimensions: (1) an activity, (2) an attitude, and (3) a body of content (Knight 1980).

**Philosophical activities** involve: synthesising mankind's knowledge, speculating beyond the limits of human knowledge, prescribing what actions and qualities are most worthwhile, and analysing human problems and how they might be solved. **Philosophical attitudes** involve being: self-aware of one's strengths and weaknesses; honestly; comprehensive in relevant data collection; penetrative in a search for basic principles, issues and solutions; and flexible in perceiving old problems in a new light. The **philosophical body of content** incorporates the study of the nature of entities: metaphysics, the study of ultimate reality; epistemology, the study of truth, knowing, and knowledge; and axiology, the study of values, which is split up into ethics and aesthetics (Knight, 1980; Gutek, 1988). Gutek (1988) has related metaphysics to educational theorising and practice in curriculum selection of subjects, learning experiences, and desired skills; epistemology to the selection of instructional and learning methodologies; and axiology to appropriate moral values and conduct in an educational situation. See Knight 1980 and Gutek 1988 for detailed explanations of the above individual philosophical approaches.

**Educational Theory**

Educational theory has emerged from the need to apply philosophy to the field of education. Although philosophical systems have incorporated some approach to education, they "usually did not attempt to create a system of thought that dealt with schooling, curriculum and instruction in the more immediate sense" (Gutek 1988, p.251). Educational theory is described by Gutek (1988) as the:

> Grouping or clustering of general ideas or propositions that explain the operations of an institution, such as a school, or a situation, such as teaching or learning; moreover, these ideas and propositions are sufficiently abstract or general that they can be transferred and applied to situations other than those in which they are directly developed (p.250).

Knight (1980), on the other hand, takes a more simplistic look at theory, suggesting that educational theory is developed to overcome educational problems. These theories seek philosophy as an underpinning. Gutek (1988) comments that educational theories are: (1) derived from or based on a larger body of thought, such as philosophy and ideology; (2) developed from reaction to social, political and economic situations; and (3) arise from practice. It should be noted that the educational system we have today has been built and shaped by the philosophical
processes over time. Bowen and Hobson (1987) in their book "Theories of Education" discuss many of the great educational thinkers through time, who have influenced the evolution of the educational models to its current state. Plato, Idealism (428 B.C.) and Aristotle, Realism (385 B.C.) form the foundation of educational thought. Rousseau, Naturalism (1752) and Dewey, Pragmatism (1916) were historical innovators of progressive educational thinking. Makarenko (1938), Skinner (1954), Peters (1965), Neill (1968), and Illich (1971) are seen as significant contributors to the debate concerning the nature and aims of education.

**Education in Summary**

Weighing Laska's and others perceptions of education, the following encapsulates their important components (See appendix for other examples of educational definitions). Education is an **intentional, and/or planned social process** that establishes within the learner preferred skills, knowledge, and values, in order to "bring a person into cultural life" (Gutek, 1988:4). These preferred skills, knowledge and values are conceived either by the learner, as in self-direction in learning, or the learning agent. These learning preferences are generated from educational philosophy adopted by the learner or the learning agent. This other party, can be classified as a specialised social agent expert in the learning process (Gutek 1988). **Control** of a learning situation incorporating decisions on appropriate strategies are selected to assist in the progress toward the attainment of **learning objectives**. These learning objectives need not be consciously defined at the beginning of the learning process (Rogers 1993). Quality of **learning** that takes place toward learning objective(s) greatly depends on whether the learner chooses to engage by finding the content worthwhile (Wlodkowski 1993). The actual **content** can be either chosen by the learner, determined for the learner by an authority figure such as a teacher, or necessitated by an act of law. Above all, the purpose of education is to bring an individual to an awareness of themselves and the sociocultural environment in which they live or desire to live through developing the abilities and skills to adjust to environmental changes by learning in a self directed manner, or with the assistance of another party. Kidd (1973; in Candy 1991) stated that the purpose of education is to "make of the subject [learner] a continuing inner-directed self-operating learner" (p.57). Hiemstra and Sisco (1990) consider that an effective educator "helps learners become more self-sustaining, more intellectually curious, and more capable of learning by themselves" (p.37). All the above: intentions, planning for the social process, control, learning objectives, content, and quality of learning are generated with the chosen educational philosophy and theory in mind.

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982, in Merriam and Caffarella 1991) consider four types of adult educational providers: (1) independent adult education organisations, (2) **educational institutions**: schools, colleges and universities, (3) quasi-educational organisations, and (4) traditionally noneducational organisations. As this paper is discussing the feasibility of implementing adult education principles within senior secondary school, a traditional educational institution, The following examination of adult education will be concerned with its application to institutional education,
and/or traditional education. A complete understanding of any educational design would only be complete with an awareness of its genesis, growth, and objective(s). Therefore, a review of the adult educational theorists who have influenced its historical development will be entered into to determine the underpinning components of adult education. From this review, a set of adult educational principles will be generated. Firstly what is an adult?

**ANDRAGOGY: FOR THE ADULT EDUCATIONALLY**

*Andragogy*

Knowles sees adult education as encompassing three areas: (1) process of adult learning (Andragogy), (2) sets of organised activities, and (3) movement or field of social practice. The *andragogical system* is constructed around six assumptions about adults and the way they learn. Before proceeding a little word of caution is needed. An assumption is defined as the act of “taken as being true, for the purpose of argument or action”, nowhere in this definition does an assumption relate to absolute truth or establish theory (Oxford Dictionary 1989, p.52). This caution is necessary for many adult educators have attempted “to erect a massive theoretical edifice concerning the nature of adult education on the foundations” of Knowles’ assumptions, which are a “set empirically unproved assumptions” (Brookfield 1986, p. 91). Which is what Knowles himself intended them to be. The andragogical assumptions are: (1) adults need to know why they need to learn something before they engage; (2) adults have a "self-concept" for making their own decisions in directing their life and the learning needed within it; (3) adults come to education with a *greater experiential base* than youth, an experiential base that determines who they are; (4) learner readiness is based being ready to learn what is needed to cope more effectively with life, (5) adults have a *life-centred or problem-centred orientation to learning*; and (6) adults are motivated by both external, more money; and the "most potent motivators are internal pressures", quality of life (Knowles. 1984, pp.55-61).

*What is an Adult in Educational Terms?*

Andragogy to Knowles is “the art and science of helping adults learn”, and is “not an ideology; it is a system of assumptions” (Knowles 1984, p.62). Andragogy is an educational system for adult learners, yet what is an adult in educational terms? Attempts to answer this question has been made by Knowles (1980, 1984), Brookfield (1986), Canton (1992), and Simpson (1995). These researchers firstly considering adulthood as defined by: performing adult social roles, chronological age, legal age, biologically and self-concept of what it is to be an adult, concluding that these categories are unsatisfactory in defining an adult educationally. Instead the tendency is to consider the cognitive growth of an individual. Canton (1992) balances *independence* with the concept of *grown-up*. Simpson (1995) concludes by quoting Rogers (1986) who considers an adult to posses three important characteristics: (1) *full development*, not reaching the peak of personal development, but the possessing of a
Adolescence is conceived as a transitional stage, taking the individual from childhood to adulthood. It has its origin with the onset of: puberty; independence drive; social changes within the family, peer group and school environment; and changes in cognitive and socioemotional processes (Graber et al. 1996). Although the onset of adolescence is reasonably defined, yet its end is somewhat problematic. Dower (1997) cited the difficulty in defining an end to adolescence lies in the “merging of adolescence into the subsequent stage of development, early adulthood” (p.13). Life course development encompasses the varying life course events that occur in an individual’s development. Adolescence is a time for major changes within individuals. Bee (1994) considers adolescence to be split into two subgroups: (1) early adolescence or adolescence, eleven to sixteen; and (2) late adolescence or youth, sixteen to nineteen.

Early adolescence is concerned with the gaining of independence, learning new social and cognitive skills, new levels of cognitive complexity are sought, self-esteem is at conflict, and egocentrism is a central theme (Bee, 1994). Biggs (1993) considers within this period an individual has reached a concrete-symbolic level of cognitive abstraction. Thinking is conceptual, relating to concrete happenings, involving the "ability to process symbols in a disembodied context, cold, with little paralinguistic support" (Donaldson, in Biggs, 1993, p.41).

Late adolescence, on the other hand, is concerned with achieving a new balance, and the beginnings of a new identity (Bee 1994). Cognitively there is a shift from concrete to formal levels of cognitive abstraction. Concepts are relatable to other concepts forming principles which imply thinking about logical possibilities (Biggs, 1993). Biggs (1993) continues to describe the next level of cognitive abstraction as post-formal, which he adds "not all [individuals] reach"(p.37). Here principles relate to other principles generating the attitude "to study and then to question". Also, of importance is the transition period from adolescence to early adulthood. Levinson's (1978) model describes this.

A transition period in life span development is seen to be a period of change, growth and disequilibrium that bridge two relatively stable points within a life span (Kimmel 1985). Levinson's (1978, in Bee 1996) Early Adult Transition describes individual development between the ages seventeen to twenty two, late adolescence. Within this transition period the young adult is seeking to become more independent and establish their individual identity. Levinson's model contends that adult development is a process toward individualisation, what Levinson calls "self-generating" (Tennant and Pogson 1995, p.85). Through life course, periods of great change take place. During these transitions the individual develops, adjusts, and transforms their thinking, to prepare to take a closer step to becoming an individual, free to act and interact independent of the influences of others. Becoming an individual incorporates the changing relationships between self and the external world in which we live. Levinson's "detribalisation", becoming free from the sociocultural constraints that
have shaped our identity (Tennant and Pogson 1995, p.85). A child is dependant on adults. As an individual matures, that dependency lessens; the child is breaking old ties, relationships and character traits for new.

Concluding Thoughts

It would seem, from the literature search thus far that late adolescence, having reached a formal cognitive level, has the cognitive ability necessary for the engagement in adult learning. According to Levinson, Biggs and Bee late adolescents are moving away from a dependence relationship with others, leading toward individuality, and development of their own self-concept. As parents, and friends we encourage this change. As employers and educators of post secondary education we expect this change to have already occurred.

The above discussion has shown education as a structured process that encourages and prepares individuals with their integration into cultural life, developing within the individual a continuing inner-directed self-operating learner. Dependent education, which is traditional education would have trouble developing a self-aware, self-directed learner. This is because the learner is taught to be dependent on a teacher figure for direction in learning. How much more equipped to tackle adult life would those individuals graduating from secondary education be if they have the skills, or are in the process of developing the skills produced by adult education methodology, namely: self-mastery, self-awareness, self-esteem, self-realisation; and learning in a self-directed manner: diagnose own learning needs, formulate own learning objectives, designs own learning plans, evaluate own learning, reflect upon own learning, and having the right to ask how, when, why, and what to learn. An individual who can apply these learning skills to all aspects of their life. Indeed adult education as seen above encourages the development of independence in learning.

APPENDIX

Other Definitions of Education

Education then is a planned learning opportunity which one party provides for another in relation to an agreed objective (Rogers, 1993:11).

Education refers very broadly to the social processes that bring a person into cultural life ... Many persons and social agencies are involved in the process of enculturation of the young. The family, the peer group, the community, the media, the church, and the state all have formative effects on the individual ... Education, in a more formal and deliberate sense, takes place in the school, a specialised social agency established to cultivate preferred skills, knowledge, and values in the learner. The school is staffed by teachers who are regarded to be experts in the learning process. Informal, or milieu education, is related to schooling, or formal education (Gateaux).
It implies that something worthwhile is being or has been intentionally transmitted in a morally acceptable manner (Peters; in Farrell, Kerry and Kerry 1995, p.70).

In contemporary society, education may be viewed as comprised of two basic elements: formal education and informal education. Formal education is that which occurs in a more structured educational setting ... elements would be school and school-related activities such as taking a course ... Informal education ... Part-time volunteer work in a hospital, babysitting, taking a summer vacation in Europe, and waiting on tables ... Central to this element is the fact that a person chooses to engage in a nonschool activity, and this participation results in some form of education (Finch and Crunkilton 1993, p.7)

REFERENCES:


