

An Auto-Biographical Introduction to the New Adult Learning Movement.

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ABSTRACT:

This article is an exploration of the Adult Learning course offered by the New Adult Learning Movement (NALM). It will outline the educational model, design and application and could form a baseline for future educational research into the use of this model in the development of academic practice in Australia.

In September 2005, as part of my PhD research I travelled to Engen, Germany to experience the work of the New Adult Learning Movement (NALM) and to interview participants and facilitators of the course.

The area of the adult educator, academic development and practice within the adult education sphere is the focus of my research. This research was the first stage of an investigation into the question: "does a specific training in biography and destiny learning have a place in the adult education sector?"

To answer this question I am exploring such areas as: What is an adult educator? What makes an adult educator? Is the adult educator an expert or a professional? What is the profile of the adult educator?

The significance of these questions came to light after my participation in this 9 week course, offered to adult educators interested in transforming their skills using biography and destiny learning principles.

This paper, then, will describe the adult training processes of this course in Engen, Germany, to train adult educators in biography and destiny learning techniques. In addition to the course description this paper will discuss the preliminary research completed with participants of the course. The data collected, will form a baseline for future research with adult educators in the adult education sector in Australia.

An Auto-Biographical Introduction to the New Adult Learning Movement.

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INTRODUCTION:

I am a PhD student interested in biography and destiny learning. My topic for this conference relates to the transitional space between biography, destiny learning, the adult educator and higher education. I am especially interested in the development of the adult educator, their links with the adult participant, academic development and practice.

The literature available on biography and educational biography discusses the importance of combining the fragments of one's personal life and educational life - schooling, family constitution, sociocultural life and occupation - in the hope of bringing meaning, reflection and transformation, Dominice (2000), Alheit (1999), Egger (1999).

I have discovered that in the field of biography, a new way of thinking is emerging that offers exciting new prospects for researchers. The area is that of the adult educator. I will explain how I arrived at this point in the following transcript, and in this sense this story is partly auto-biographical.

In September 2005, as part of my PhD research I travelled to Engen, Germany to experience the work of the New Adult Learning Movement (NALM) and to interview participants and facilitators of the Adult Educators Course.

This research was the first stage of an investigation into the question: "Does a specific training in biography and destiny learning have a place in higher education?"

Before attending the course I was seeking a focus for this question, now, after participation in the nine week course, I have found a focus that will guide and refine future investigations.

This paper explores the scope and impact of the Adult Educators course offered by NALM. It begins with an outline of the educational model. Then I briefly consider the ways participation in this course affected me. These considerations raise questions and issues for how I will approach the analysis of other participants' experiences, and consider future work and research into academic development in higher education in Australia.

BACKGROUND

NALM has a history that extends to countries such as England, Germany, Canada and The Netherlands. Originally Coen van Houten and Bernard Lievegoed worked with biographical principles in Holland. Eventually forming the Centre for Social Development in England, Coen van Houten, Shirley Routledge, Karl-Heinz Finke and Angela Youdale developed workshops and courses based on Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophical principles to meet the demand for biography work. Many years later, they branched out and created NALM - the New Adult Learning Movement. Now operating from Germany, the New Adult Learning Movement focuses on the renewal of adult education.

NALM is a movement that represents professional adult educators who are interested in the development of the human being from a biographical and karmic perspective, based on Anthroposophical principles.

The profile of the adult educator was one focus of this course and considered such things as:

- What is an adult educator?
- How do I become an adult educator?
- What makes me an adult educator?
- What is the profile of the adult educator?
- Is the image of the adult educator obsolete?

One feature was to show that to become an adult educator of the 21st century requires one to work with moving processes instead of fixed systems.

A LEADING IMAGE OF THE ADULT EDUCATOR

According to the New Adult Learning Movement, the profile of the adult educator of the 21st century is one who opens learning pathways for the adult learner, one who has developed their own learning processes, who is aware of their own learning blockages (resistances) and can become an 'instrument' for students to develop their own learning processes. Content then, becomes a secondary requirement, as facts are given, not for regurgitation but to enable developmental processes in the learner. The role of the educator becomes one of 'possible maker' in learning path I, 'fellow being' in learning path II and 'guide' in learning path III, (van Houten 1995:2000).

There are a number of other things to consider in relation to this model.

- there are two fundamental principles that underlie all adult learning that adult educators must promote to ensure a balance and harmonious learning culture, these are: the "awakening" of the adult learners will to learn and a "sense of truth" in their learning.
- seven life processes occur in adult learning
- seven learning processes occur in adult learning
- three pathways have been developed that offer new ways in adult

education.

- the three learning pathways should permeate each other
- biography and destiny learning are tools used in the three learning pathways
- seven professional fields are tools used in the three learning pathways
- a form of Socratic questioning is a tool used in the three learning pathways
- adult educators strive to be “possible makers” in path I; “fellow human beings” in path II; “guides” in path III.

The three Pathways are the following:

Pathway I - Learning to Learn - addresses the adult learning processes; this first pathway assists the adult learner to understand, individualise and apply knowledge learned to their future life tasks and is commonly known as vocational learning. Here one works with the questions of ‘who am I’ and ‘where am I situated in the world?’ van Houten (1995 p. 17) calls this our “drive for knowledge”.

Pathway II - Destiny Learning - or learning through life, the second pathway facilitates identification and understanding of life experiences. Here one works with the question ‘who was I?’ van Houten (1995 p. 17) calls this our “drive for development”.

Pathway III - Creative Research Learning is the schooling of new faculties. This third learning pathway offers the possibility to transform and order one’s life through observation of both inner and outer world experiences with the aim of generating something new in the world. Here one works with the question ‘who will I become?’ van Houten (1995 p. 17) calls this our “drive for perfection”.

The seven life processes is a new way to prepare, present and digest content, and works in conjunction with the seven learning processes. These processes are the foundation of adult learning in this model. The life processes and learning processes are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Life processes and learning processes from van Houten 1995.

<u>Life Processes</u>	<u>Learning Processes</u>
Breathing <i>we breathe in our environment</i>	Observing
Warming <i>we connect with the information</i>	Relating
Digesting <i>information is "born anew"</i>	Assimilating
Secreting (sorting) <i>the information "becomes me"</i>	Individualising
Maintaining <i>working with the new information</i>	Exercising
Growing <i>recognising new abilities</i>	Developing new abilities
Reproducing <i>generating something new in the world</i>	Creating

This paper will focus predominantly on the first pathway - Learning to Learn as it assists the adult educator to deepen their own learning processes and is the first step in answering the question: "Does a specific training in biography and destiny learning have a place in higher education.

I will explore my own experience of the new principles of the New Adult Learning Movement.

THE COURSE

The Adult Educators Course runs for eleven weeks. In 2005 the course was offered in a nine week block from September 26 - November 25 with the final two weeks being offered in March 2006.

THE PEOPLE:

Twelve participants, from six countries attended the course. Germany, England, Switzerland, Iraq, Italy and Australia were all represented. There were five adult educators from Germany, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland and Canada.

LEARNING TO LEARN - PATHWAY I - DEEPENING LEARNING PROCESSES

There were many themes and processes that were experienced throughout this four week block that strengthened the two fundamental principles of the adult educator as proposed by van Houten (1995, 2000). These principles are "the ongoing awakening of the adult learner's will to learn {which is} the main aim of vocational learning and the second fundamental principle that must be unceasingly generated is the sense of truth", (van Houten 2000 p.18). These fundamental principles can be 'schooled' using the seven Professional Fields - all of which were worked with throughout the nine weeks.

THE SEVEN PROFESSIONAL FIELDS

I. Schooling of Observation Skills - requires that we become selfless observers of ourselves, others and the world instead of being reactors to others and world events. Learning comes from our observation hence it is desirable for adult educators to be trained in selfless observation skills. This starts with observing objects and events presented to us in an honest and individualised way and recognises that each of us individualise and observe differently.

Selfless observation skills are used in all three learning paths. In learning path I observation requires "the proper use of the 12 senses", (van Houten, 2000 p.44). In learning path II observing and differentiating the relationship between our inner and outer world is necessary for self knowledge, and in

learning path III selfless observation is required to understand the questions and initiatives that are presented to us from the world around us.

II. Schooling Independent Judgement - this is not judgement in the general sense, it concerns finding one's own judgement and assessment in any given situation. It includes cognitive, aesthetic and moral judgements. A cognitive judgement is identifying an object, an aesthetic judgement is concerned with our relationship to the object and a moral judgement is the decision making process which relates to our conscience, our will, our courage, consequences and personal values. It is necessary to school these abilities in every area of adult education, because when these three judgement processes unite, our sense of truth is broadened.

Knowledge of how we observe and relate to others and the world is an important part of independent judgement and is concerned with discernment, that is, perceiving clearly or having quick insight. It involves overcoming the should's or should not's type of judgement. To expand this ability our inner activity has to be considered. We can go from passive to active discerners by being active in three ways, by developing skills of attentiveness, devotion (empathy) and uprightness. With attentiveness we direct ourselves towards the world with attention. Devotion or empathy is the opposite of attentiveness, we now consider the affect the object has on our inner world (feelings), and with uprightness we ensure we are not overtaken by sense impressions. With practice we develop a research attitude. This research attitude is a different way of relating to the sense world. We learn to live in processes - to be consciously active, (Routledge 2005).

III. Schooling of one's Ability to Encounter - the importance of true encounter was emphasised and practiced. We experience the existence of the other when we encounter. A real encounter is therefore, a threshold experience. The first step in this process is to build up an understanding between one's inner and outer world. The second step is to accept the other as they really are and the third is to allow the other to see me as I really am. Consequently, self confrontation is a first step in adult learning.

IV. Integrating the three Learning Paths - in all three learning paths the seven learning processes are implemented albeit with different aims. The aims are to "understand the world" (learning path I), to "understand oneself" (learning path II) and to "understand the spirit" (learning path III), (van Houten, 2000 p.42).

In vocational learning (learning path I) the aim is to impart knowledge and to assist in the development of the student. The educator becomes a 'possible maker'.

In destiny learning (learning path II) the aim is to meet the student on a human level by recognising the learning that takes place between educator/student and student/student. To recognise that both student and educator bring to the learning situation experiences and knowledge from life and that "every encounter whether it is a success or not creates destiny", (van Houten 2000 p.47).

Questions arise such as:

- Who is involved in the learning situation?
- What ability is to be schooled, for both the student and the educator?
- How do I as an educator stimulate the development of the person standing in front of me?
- How do students make possible their own learning?

In the second learning path, both educator and student have a shared responsibility. The educator's responsibility is to discover how to develop themselves in an attempt to understand and develop the needs of the student. The student's responsibility is to discover what it is they want to learn from the encounter with the educator and other students. In this way, the destiny learning path becomes a path of self knowledge. In this learning path, the educator and student become 'fellow human beings'.

The third learning path (creative research learning) requires the relationship between educator and student to develop further. Here the educator is a guide rather than an expert. The aim of this learning path is to develop an ability to bring something to the world in a new way - an initiative - the first two learning paths are a pre requisite for this initiative to develop. The educator's role here is to serve the other.

Integrating "the three learning paths, can transform us into self learning and self developing individuals", (van Houten 2000 p.48).

V. Schooling of Day Learning - or daily learning. Examples are vocational learning (learning path I) destiny learning or learning through life (learning path II) and creative research learning (learning path III) - recognising through our abilities and talents - (that are strengthened through learning paths I and II), - new faculties and opportunities that come to us from the world, including resistances.

VI. Schooling of Night Learning - night learning spans the three learning paths in the following ways: it complements day time learning in that it supports learning that has taken place throughout the day, (learning path I). Night learning is concerned with the digesting and evaluation of events/deeds and thoughts that have occurred.

A starting point is to do an evaluation of the day's learning processes by asking questions such as: What have I learned today? How did I learn it? What new questions have arisen in me? Is there a question I want to take into the night - due to the events/deeds and thoughts of the day? (van Houten 1995).

In learning path II night learning works as a type of bridge, connecting path I (vocational learning) and path III (creative research learning). This is experienced through the evaluation or review of one's learning at the end of the day and in the morning reflecting on any changes/insights that may have occurred 'overnight' - we often have answers or clarification to questions or issues that have been taken into the night regarding new initiatives.

At the NALM course the two Professional Fields V and VI were repeated daily.

VII. Schooling abilities to implement the seven learning processes - a first step in schooling one's ability to implement the seven learning processes is the ability to transform the seven life processes into the seven learning processes. The seven life processes are the natural life processes of our body - breathing, warming, digesting, secreting, maintaining, growing and reproducing.

We can transform these life processes into learning processes by *observing our world* (both inner & outer), *relating* or connecting to incoming information, *assimilating* the information, *individualising* the information, *maintaining* or working with the transformed information, recognising the *new abilities that have developed within me* from doing this process and *creating* or generating something new into the world from this process.

These two by seven processes are the foundation of adult learning and were worked with every day in the group sessions (van Houten 2000).

The seven Professional Fields also assists in the schooling of our ability to implement the seven learning processes. This is because an understanding of how we observe, judge, and encounter ourselves, others and the world, and knowledge of how we learn as independent beings supports this transformation.

COURSE STRUCTURE AND DESIGN

A daily rhythm was created to ensure we had a structure to support our commitment and responsibilities to the learning process. A rhythm is a necessary requirement of adult learning and throughout the nine weeks the same daily and weekly rhythm was adhered to.

See Table 2:

Table 2: Daily and Weekly Rhythm

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Night echoes (night learning) | 2. Observation exercise |
| 3. Lecture | 4. Group Work (digesting lecture) |
| 5. Artistic Activity | 6. Group Work |
| 7. Individual work | 8. Review of day |

Adult learning also requires that participants are aware of (a) the aim of the activity, (b) processes to be undertaken, and (c) timeframes etc,. This was adhered to throughout the nine weeks.

A unique design component of the course was the role of the facilitators. As stated in point IV above facilitators were 'possible makers', 'fellow human beings' or 'guides' depending on the activity and the theme of the week.

This resulted in meeting the aims of Professional Field IV, and allowed facilitators to participate fully in the learning processes. This meant that they built up a rapport with others as they witnessed the unique learning journey of the participants, and we the participants witnessed the learning journey of the facilitators - (educational biography).

EVALUATION OF PROCESSES

This was an important part of the nine week course and was part of all activities completed. Common questions at the end of an activity were:

- What was my experience?
- What did I learn from this experience?
- Did I meet myself in a new way?
- Did I find out something about myself?
- What did I learn from the group exercise?
- How did I experience the group exercise?
- In what kind of situation would this be a good exercise?
- What kind of sentence/aim would you use to introduce this exercise so it brings out the best learning experience?

This type of evaluation helped participants to recognise and evaluate any resistances that occurred in their learning.

MY EXPERIENCES OF THE COURSE

Development of self knowledge requires one to be a 'selfless' observer of one's inner and outer worlds. This was expressed in the daily and weekly rhythms in the following way. Every morning an observation exercise was completed. We observed plants, nature, our environment, our colleagues, ourselves. This was the practical exercise - the doing.

The other side of schooling observation skills and independent judgements was the Socratic questioning that took place continuously throughout the day. Such questions as what did I learn?, what was my experience?, of this lecture, artistic activity, group work, were posed. These questions were a great learning tool as they helped me view my inner and outer worlds - it was amazing to realise how differently I viewed these two components of my being - the difference between inner self reaction and outer self reaction and the different reactions of the others was a highlight. The questions promoted educational and social interaction as the sharing of one's experiences was a teaching tool.

One way of expressing answers was to write a sentence related to the event and share it either with a partner or the bigger group. For example, pick a moment in the exercise where a new thought or picture developed for you and create a question. Then, share in the group.

In the first few weeks I learned a lot about the way I see the world, the way I react to the world and a lot about how others see and react to the world. This gave me a kind of humility - remembering that I was in many respects a stranger in a strange land (an Australian in Germany who could not speak the language).

However, after a few weeks of experiencing this type of questioning, I began to feel an irritation, a type of exhaustion and felt my personal space and thoughts were being invaded, I felt exposed. What was happening here, why did we evaluate everything so closely? Were these facilitators so unsure of their program that they required continual feedback?

Later I learned (through the exercises), that this was part of my resistance to learning -or self learning - and that my feelings and reactions were an expression of path I in this model, (working with the questions who am I and where am I situated in the world - instigated by self observation and observation of other's processes, and by practicing the seven life and learning processes). It further demonstrated how one works with moving processes instead of fixed systems and highlighted the relevance and place of the second learning pathway, (recognition and understanding of life experiences), when teaching in this way.

As a life long learner, adult educator and researcher, I have developed many thoughts and ideas in relation to the needs of both adult student and adult educator, so one can imagine the impact this learning had on me. It was hard to observe oneself so deeply.

From talks with students and colleagues over the years, I have had the feeling that many (like myself) are seeking answers to questions such as:

- Who am I and where am I situated in the world?
- What is my life task?
- How can I make a contribution to my students, my colleagues, the local and global community?

Schooling of the professional fields emphasised that when one is a life long learner, questions like these are never resolved, they continue to develop and evolve, for example:

AFTER THE COURSE

An Ah Ha Moment (Feb 7 06) - being a student, adult educator and now a researcher, for most of my adult life, I have continuously rebelled and fought "the educational system", in the fear of being "labelled" a good or bad student, a good or bad teacher and the most recent "label" a good or bad academic, (resistances). I have been determined to be different, alternative, use complimentary ideas and methods, be freer in my thinking, my relationships, and my activities.

Recently, then, while deep in discussion with supervisors regarding this conference paper and presentation, (my first), I realised that I am in fact, in training to be an academic, as PhD students often are! While being amazed, there is a real feeling of fear, as I come to terms with this overwhelming realisation.

- How did it happen?
- When did it happen?
- How could I be an academic?

I don't think like an academic, I don't write like an academic and I don't teach like an academic.

- How could I possibly be in training to be an academic?

Of course this type of thinking disregards the fact that I have been at university for many years, but that was not the point at that moment.

- Who am I now?
- Who will I become?
- What will I do?
- Will this 'discovery' impact on my learning journey, my employment prospects?

The point here is that such a deep realisation has shaken me, while at the same time strengthened me. I have come to this realisation freely, I have taken on the task and written this paper, accepted an offer to present at the upcoming conference and it has awakened new questions within me. Here is an example of the three learning paths working in unison - the end result - generating something new in the world.

It has taken me many years to integrate the two parts of myself (inner and outer worlds) in relation to education, however, now that I have, I offer this example as an illustration of the processes one experiences to gain self knowledge - a requirement according to the NALM's philosophy to be an effective adult educator in the 21st century.

CONCLUSION

I have outlined the course and demonstrated the complexity of this model. It is an all encompassing philosophical model based on Anthroposophical (wisdom of the human being) principles.

I travelled to Germany to take part in this course and to interview other participants and facilitators as a first phase in the investigation of the research question "Does a specific training in biography and destiny learning have a place in higher education?"

I have achieved my goals and interviewed both participants and facilitators, but have refrained from commenting on this data as it is yet to be analysed. Instead, I offer examples of my own experiences and realise that there is much that can be debated regarding my interpretation of these experiences. However, these examples do excite the researcher in me and stimulate my interest in the lasting effects this learning continues to have on me.

A next step perhaps in refining my research question is to analyse the data collected and “unpack” and interpret the second learning pathway (Destiny Learning). A future paper will discuss the place biography work has in this model.

I look forward with enthusiasm to the next stages in my development as a learner, teacher, researcher and academic.

I will conclude with a quotation from a colleague who shared in these experiences with me. In response to the question: Did this course meet your expectations?: my colleague answered:

“I have done many courses in my life - university and others - and I always remain the same. I get more methods, information and techniques - but nothing changes in myself - there is no quality. This course gave me new information but it is also a learning path for myself. It has changed something in me. I am no longer the same person”.

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