Kansas State University Libraries

New Prairie Press

Adult Education Research Conference

2018 Conference Proceedings (Victoria, BC Canada)

Finding Opportunity in Change: Community Empowerment & Metagogy

Gabriele Strohschen
DePaul University, gstrohsc@depaul.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://newprairiepress.org/aerc

Part of the Adult and Continuing Education Commons, Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons, and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Commons

Recommended Citation

Finding Opportunity in Change: Community Empowerment & Metagogy

Gabriele Strohschen
DePaul University

Introduction: Back to the Future

At times, especially at those times when a society is in flux, confusion prevails and generally results in the retrenching of mindsets. Adult Education endeavors have been no exception to such communal psycho-socio behavior over the decades in the USA. Yet, DePaul University established a "new, experimental unit of study" to be called the "Experimental School of DePaul University, unless someone thinks of a more appropriate name" (Richardson, 1971). In 1972, DePaul University in Chicago trail-blazed an approach to education for adults in its undergraduate, and later its graduate educational offerings. The concept, initiated by Vincentian priest Fr. Richardson, was inspired by the Zeitgeist of the time, which opposed conventional banking education (Freire, 1970) and built upon the long-standing tradition of democratic ideals and critical reflection in education (Dewey, 1938). In the words of the Rev. John T. Richardson, the first objective of this school was:

> To shape units and programs of study to meet the distinctive needs of particular groups of persons. This objective assumes that over and above the purposes now served by the University's various academic programs there are needs for specially tailored study which is different from existing programs and is subject to change that is as rapid as changes in the social, economic, and humanistic environment. In traditional academic programs the student is expected to develop predetermined competencies; in this unit the programs are expected to be formed to fit the competencies of a group of students' needs. (1971)

Hence, SNL was grounded in the emerging education philosophies, primarily the assessment of prior learning and competence-based education within student-designed curricula. A paradigm for educating adults, SNL survived under the leadership of its founders and early leaders. However, as higher education institutions sought economic survival in part by entering the arena of workforce development, conventional instructional approaches veered off those earlier innovations that combined the liberal arts with preparatory professional study. Conventional higher education approaches date back to the early 6th Century, and North American university programs are modeled after those of the cathedral schools and monasteries of the Middle Ages (Begley & Koterski, 2005). Today, few university degree programs offer alternatives to such

traditions, even with curricula and delivery methods based on their interpretations of andragogy (Knowles 1970, 1980, 1977). Perhaps, universities risk non-accreditation were they to color too much outside of the lines of conventional ISD; and sticking to conventions in practices reverberates in the expectations of employers, students, and private and public funders. Yet, we forego the possibilities that are found in intercontinental/intercultural knowledge and practices of Adult Education. Although models for Universities of Applied Sciences (e.g., the German Fachhochschule) have existed all along, by and large the USAsian higher education industry perpetuated the conventions in development and delivery of education and training programs into the 21st Century. The emerging education philosophy of the visionary priest at DePaul University was not preserved over the decades, even at DePaul University, and eventually the resultant mission creep gave way to retrench education programming to the conventions of the academy.

Background on *New Learning* Design Elements

SNL's Original Applied Studies Concept

The original *new* learning approach had been primarily grounded in andragogy (Knowles, 1970) and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). In this educat*ing* approach, a framework of knowledge and skill domains guided the development of personalized competence statements, of learning activities, and of learning products, aligned to the context of the individual student's focus area (*major*). There were no resident faculty; there were no pre-designed degree programs built by academics. There was a framework of competences that scaffolded personalized curriculum development. This framework reflected contemporary knowledge and skills, as deemed necessary by SMEs and adult students for their professional and personal development.

Adults were able to integrate their work and personal expertise and experiences with their academic studies, making their curricula relevant, practical, and motivating. In consultation and with iterative feedback from a Faculty Mentor and a Subject Matter Expert, students designed, implemented, and reflected on particular learning activities to achieve competency within the delineated competence framework, which was personalized in individual curricula. Emerging "professions" were often concretized by amalgamating study in a multi-disciplinary program.

Adult learners gained these competences, per individualized Learning Plans, in practice settings, which were current work sites or volunteer endeavors. Learning products were in evidence and assessed by SMEs, and adults provided such evidence after completion of learning activities, such as guided independent research; assessment of analyzed and reflected upon prior learning experiences; oral examinations; presentations in a variety of settings;

community or work projects; and the occasional course taken at DePaul University or other institutions. At the same time, liberal learning complemented their applied study with group seminars and assessment and integration sessions, led collaboratively by students and facilitators.

Over the years, SNL's *new learning* approach at the undergraduate and graduate levels was successfully exported to institutions of higher education in Thailand, Kenya, Ireland, and China. The USA-based SNL competence-based undergraduate program, in the meantime, morphed into a version that replicated traditional pre-designed, group-based, and seat-time-delimited instruction. The once student-designed programs, which were quick to complete within a wide range of instructional delivery formats, now became convoluted and burdensome for all. Although it was the intent to scaffold adults' success grounded in SNL's approach to adult learning, these changes resulted in a retrenching to conventional programming and a layering of more academic advising and administrative processes. Marketing and recruitment efforts failed to attract students because of their inability to understand and explain the model, and increasingly adult students voted with their feet when the program design changes muddied the simplicity of the original experimental school structure that had met adult learners' needs with great agility, as the original experiment sought to offer.

At the moment, SNL is reinventing itself to serve adult and non-traditional students within the larger context of DePaul University's mission and education program offerings. It is within this background and milieu, that my action research illuminated opportunities for educating adult and non-traditional learners within a context of community empowerment and Metagogy.

Agile Education Praxes: Our Goal and How to Get There

We do not teach subjects; we teach adults.

Phenomenology and critical theory provide the structure for a praxis of adult education that has the goal of personal and community transformation. Such a praxis centers on the obligation to one's self (i.e., in roles of student and teacher) to engage in critical reflection and dialogue. Its educa*ting* processes elucidate how we would actually strengthen an ego-self were we to continue to use the language and thoughts of that which oppresses our transformation. Think of these processes as pivotal to averting a *banking model* of education, a term popularized by Freire (1970) that critiques conventional education systems and approaches.

In his landmark contribution to the field of adult education, Sherman Stanage (1987) made clear that the subject of adult education is the leading forth of capacities of adults. He

applied principles of constitutive phenomenology to the process of *eduction of person* through "feeling, experiencing, and consciousing" (1987, p. 328), depicted below:

PERSON

Consciousing……………
Experiencing……………
Feeling…………………

Fig. 1. Model of Person. Graphically adapted by Strohschen.

Stanage's adult *eduction* is to answer the questions: Who Am I; What Can I Know; What Should I Do; and What May I Hope. Based on principles of constitutive phenomenology, the recurrent examination of feelings, experiencings, and consciousings creates our personhood, within the context of dialogue. It aims at becoming aware of the states of one's own and others' essential perceptions of realities, *each time at one moment in one given context.* This concept of educating adults does not call for facilitating transformation; it calls for supporting agile agency in recurring and continuing being and becoming. Surely, a high level of self-awareness and emotional intelligence functions emancipatorily; and person ought to be a precursor to leading others toward emancipation. Education programs ought to aim at having adults arrive at such self-awareness, with the educator leading forth in midwife fashion such becoming, or, in Stanage's concept, *educing person*. Clarity about one's and others' values, views, and realities is essential to engaging in rigorous question-posing to find solutions together and move toward personal and community transformation. Our praxes ought to guide us toward such clarity.

Critical Reflection and Commonalities on Praxes

Stanage's concepts undergird Blended Shore Education. Started in 2006, a three-year international-intercultural action research study with 32 adult education practitioners from 20 countries in five continents crystallized universal values and practices in educating adults in a great variety of settings and socio-cultural environs (Strohschen, 2009). In the resultant Blended

Shore Education (BSE) approach, essential values and principles are grounded in the rich narratives, which show patterns of common values and universals amongst our praxes. As Gergen (2009, p. ix) pointed out, "As we confront the future of our professional endeavors, we tend to rely with confidence on longstanding and widely honored assumptions about the world and ourselves." BSE, on the other hand, offers up thematic constructs for deep analysis of their underlying paradigmatic assumptions (Brookfield, 1995). In that, the BSE approach asks practitioners to critically examine vantage points before designing education programs. It then asks us to draw from many education perspectives within a *both-and* mindset (Strohschen, 2009) to develop and delivery educational offerings.

Four Pillars: Concepts for Critical (re)Consideration of Assumptions and Values

Thematic Constructs	Concepts
Development	Hegemony/Neutrality/Intentions
Standards	Professionalization/Collaboration/Certification
Lifelong Learning/Education	History/Constructs/Critical Inquiry
Spirituality/Spirit-fullness	Indigenous Wisdoms/Interdependence

(Strohschen, 2009, p. 20)

BSE provided evidence that thematic constructs are shared across continents and cultures in our field. The BSE approach suggests that radical reflection by educationists is essential to authentic and critical discourse in our field, as the authors in the book's chapters espouse; i.e., the sort of analysis that examines the fundamental, essential nature of something (Stanage,1987).

Yes, critical reflection approaches in delivery of education programs have been primarily based on Mezirow's transformational learning theory (1981; 1991). His tenets center on exploration of one's world view through examined experience, critical reflection, and rational dialogue that leads to revisiting one's worldview and changing one's meaning perspectives and schemes. Baumgartner (2001) and Taylor (1998) thoroughly examined such theories of transformative learning, and they did broaden the discourse on critical reflection.

Beyond that, however, the sort of critical reflection needed to be pivotal to a contemporary and future praxis intends to engage us in radical thinking to deconstruct prevailing paradigmatic assumptions and values, leading to transformation of self and society by means of a new direction in the goals and processes of education we then co-construct.

Considerations brought to the field by philosopher Stanage (1987), a far-sighted educator, centered the essential purpose of Adult Education on what he termed the *eduction* of adults, which makes sense when we consider the meaning of the Latin root word, educere (i.e., 'lead out', from e- (a variant of ex-) 'out' + ducere 'to lead'). With that, critical reflection is deeply rooted in phenomenology and the tenets for Adult Education put forth by Stanage. The analysis of worldwide education praxes (Strohschen, 2009) from which emerged the BSE concept are grounded in those tenets and in Freire's liberatory education. Amalgamating these tenets, theories, and findings of my BSE action research, I also pulled out methods I had collected in my rucksack during a few decades of community organizing work in Chicago prior to entering academia full-time.

Community Connexxions: Innovations through Collaboration Building

Therefore, in 2012, I initiated a series of pilot projects for competence-based education design and delivery for adult and non-traditional adults by creating a loosely-knit group of leaders in the public, faith-based, and business sector in Chicago; artists; veterans; and DPU students. The collective became known as *Community Connexxions*. We created community-based learning projects focused on mutual capacity-building by means of art, performances, education seminars, and entrepreneurial activities. The following exemplify how we planned and implemented the "courses" for credit-bearing projects. Each project addressed multiple competences and allowed for individual work in different "subjects," for example:

- **2016 Food for the Soul** and **How Our Poetry Educates** (HOPE): Students engaged with community residents in planning performances at the Fifth City Stage; coordinated PR and marketing activities; and filmed and edited videos of the event.

- **2014 Emancipation Celebration: From Canboulay to Juneteenth:** Students and parents of Spencer Academy, the Sankofa Cultural Arts & Business Center, the West Side Historical Preservation Society, several West Side artists, and SNL students planned and implemented educational activities on the theme during 12 weekly sessions. Students studied and practiced drumming, singing, dancing and, poetry performances. Conducted at the elementary school, the project culminated in participation of the elementary school students in the Annual Juneteenth Parade on the West Side – Chicago Avenue.

- **2013 Walking the Walk**: In an education project on the early work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on Chicago's West Side, Michele Clark STEM High School students worked with SNL students, senior residents, and veterans to document the genesis of the civil rights movement. A community forum on the theme of social change with panelists included International Civil Rights Activist Don Mullan and local elected officials and activists. A Living Museum with artwork by the youth, a photo journal, and a video documentary were produced by students.

The SNL competence framework for applied study gave us the flexibility to go far beyond service learning practices in Higher Education in developing and implementing education programs for DePaul University students. CC's educational offerings were developed collaboratively with stakeholders as well as students and teachers. In these projects we ultimately generated authentic partnerships within disenfranchised neighborhoods to create the context for empowerment, to strengthen relationships within and across communities, and to build trust across typically unlikely partners. With the social and civic engagement *by* all participants, intentional and incidental learning *for* all participants brought to light the varying world views and realities and shed light on assumptions. This crucial first step to authentic dialogue across ~ims happened in these rather unconventional "education" settings.

Learning - Teaching Spectrum   **Approach**:

			CT	CT
		CT	AF	AF
CT	CT	AF	ASP	ASP
	PCA	ASP	APM	APM
PDT	PDT	APM	PCA	PCA
		C	C	C
			AL	AL

Pedagogue – Directive Teaching, Critical Analyzing (PDT, PCA)
Andragogue – Facilitating Learning, Strategic Partnering, Process Managing (AF, ASP, APM)
Cybergogue – Using technology as catalyst in mediating instruction (CT)
Coach – Guiding learner to reflect on experience (C)
Adaptive Leader – Strengthening decision-making and emotional intelligence (AL)

Relationship: **Directive ⬦ Collaborative ⬦ Independent ⬦ Interdependent**

The Metagogy approach to designing and delivering instruction *by, with, and for* stakeholders moves back and forth a spectrum of relationships and corresponding approaches, depending on the context. An UBUNTU-informed mindset (Gade, 2011; Ramose, 2003) to Adult Education integrates multi-faceted community-based learning projects, events, and academic activities in design and in the context and content of instructing. In the experimental approaches of leading adults, the roles of teachers, learners, and community members became redefined through this combined action research in 2009 and the Community Connexxions community projects with the resultant Metagogy Project (2016).

Finding Opportunity in Change: Community Empowerment & Metagogy

The Reverend Richardson suggested, "To give new impetus and a new organization though which DePaul can continue to fulfill its distinctive and traditional role of offering opportunities of study to persons who otherwise would not be able to realize certain career and personal goals." (1971). As a graduate program faculty mentor in this 21st Century, I have had the opportunity to experiment with new directions in teaching and learning within the context of the Vincentian mission of social engagement at DePaul University. I expanded on SNL's holistic and experimental approaches to educating through collaborations with our City's stakeholders. This praxis steered clear of an *either – or* attitude in designing content and delivering instruction.

Co-designed learning activities *by, with, and for* students, teachers, and community members were based on jointly identified needs with aligned solutions. Hence, all educational offerings, within this approach moved away from "we build it – we hope they come" tactics. We embraced a variety of strategies, methods, and techniques in educating that were informed by many a ~gogy and education philosophy, so long as they aligned to the learning tasks at hand. With that, this collaboration among players in the vast field of adult education could move about at different paces and in different directions, while connected at particular intersections and reaching individual competences appropriate in contemporary, inter-cultural, inter-continental, and inter-sector adult education. Ultimately, the Community Connexxions' civic and social engagement projects institutionalized authentic, real-life experiences as teaching and assessment strategies, relevant to and accepted by the learners, the university, and the community stakeholders.

References

Baumgartner, L. M. (2001). An update on transformational learning. New Directions
for Adult and Continuing Education, 89, 15-24. Retrieved December 15, 2014 from
http://www.esd.edu/~knorum/learningpapers/transform.htm.

Begley, R. B., & Koterski, S.J. (2005). Medieval education. New York, N.Y.: Fordham University Press.

Brookfield, S. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: Collier Books

Freire, P. (1995). *Pedagogy of hope. Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum.

Gade, C. B. N. (2011). *"The Historical Development of the Written Discourses on Ubuntu"* (PDF). South African Journal of Philosophy. 30*(3)*: 303–329.

Gergen, K.J. (2001). Social constructionism in context. London: Sage Publishing

Jarvis, P. (1987). *Adult Learning in the Social Context*, London: Croom Helm.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice Hall.

Knowles, M. S. (1970, 1980). *The modern practice of adult education. Andragogy versus pedagogy*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall/Cambridge.

Mezirow, J. (1981). A critical theory of adult learning and education [Electronic version]. *Adult Education, 32*(1), 3-24.

Mezirow, J. (1991) Transformative dimensions of adult learning. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

McKnight, J. (1968). Community action. In E. Ginzberg (Ed.), *Business leadership and the Negro crisis* (pp. 161-168). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Ramose, M. B. (2003). The philosophy of *ubuntu* and *ubuntu* as a philosophy In P. H. Coetzee & A. P. J. Roux (Eds), *The African philosophy reader* (2nd Ed). (pp. 230–238). New York/London: Routledge.

Richardson, J. (1971). Proposal for a new, experimental unit of study at De Paul University. Chicago: DePaul University Library, Special Collections and Reproductions.

Stanage, S.M. (1987). Adult Education and Phenomenological Research: New Directions for Theory, Practice, and Research. Malabar, FLA: Krieger Publishing

Strohschen, G. (2016). *Blended Shore Education: Civic Engagement and Competencies in 21st Century Doctoral Education.* In D. Ramdeholl and T. Heaney (Eds). (pp. 45–61) New Directions in Adult and Continuing Education entitled, "Reimagining Doctoral Education as a Practice of Adult Education."

Strohschen, G., & Associates. (2016). The Metagogy Project: A theorem for a contemporary adult education praxis. With Foreword by Alan Knox. Atlanta, GA: American Scholars Press.

Strohschen, G. (2014). *The Community Connexxions Project: A University's Civic Engagement Approach to Bridging Racism and Classism in Urban Chicago by Examining Identity.* In Efrat Tzadik, R. Vemuri and R. Fisher (Eds). 7th Global Conference on Inter-culturalism, Meaning, and Identity. 18th March –20th March. Prague, Czech Republic.

Strohschen, G. (2011). *Global Recurrent Education: Considerations on the Role of the Adult Educator.* In V. Wang (Ed). (pp. 118-134). Encyclopedia of Information Communication Technologies and Adult Education Integration. Hershey, PA.: IGI Global.

Strohschen, G. (Ed.). (2009). *Handbook of blended shore education: Adult program development and delivery*. With Foreword by Kenneth Gergen. New York: Springer International.

Strohschen, G., & Elazier, K. (2007). *The 21st Century adult educator: Strategic and consultative partner*. Assumption University Journal 1*(1),* 42-53.

Taylor, E.W. (1998). The theory and practice of transformative learning: A critical review. Information Series No. 374. Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, & Vocational Education, Center on Education and Training for Employment, College of Education. The Ohio State University.