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## Theory and Practice on Training and Professional Development in Adult and Continuing Education

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January 1994

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Occasional Paper number 1

**TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
IN  
ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION**

*Edited by:*

*Roseanne Benn  
and  
Roger Fieldhouse*

*1994*

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THEORY AND PRACTICE ON TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT IN ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

BY JOHN A. HENSCHKE

ABSTRACT:

Theory and practice in the curriculum for preparation of educators of adults have seldom been addressed in the same places or time frames. Much less, there have been few attempts to bring theory and practice together in any coherent way. Nevertheless, expressions of concern and discontent from adult educators and the general adult populace involved in learning experiences abound which question "why do adult educators violate in their own programs everything that is known about how adults learn?" However, comments of satisfaction with the current situation may prompt one to suggest that the theory and practice relationship will not be solved, but that it should continue to be discussed, as well as each person becoming clear about factors influencing her/his perspective on the issue.

This paper proposes to: clarify the definitions of theory, practice and curriculum related to the preparation of educators of adults; trace some historical background of the issue; present a case illustration of one educator of adults, prepared in an academic curriculum not only supportive of the theory and practice connection, but also advocated congruence between the two. In addition, the case illustration describes how that educator of adults worked on the theory and practice issue in his professional context as he has continued to learn as well as facilitate the preparation of educators of adults. Content and process elements of the curriculum he experienced in preparation and, which he presents, through his university career, in various contexts and cultures are included. With this addition to the debate of the issue, others are invited and encouraged to also engage in a discussion of the theory and practice by contributing their points of view.

# Theory and Practice in the Curriculum Preparing Educators of Adults

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## INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

Theory and practice in the preparation of educators of adults have seldom been addressed in the same places or time frames. In fact, Devlin (1939) distinctly separates theory and practice by definition: "Theory is a doctrine or scheme of things which terminates in speculation or contemplation without a view to practice;" (p. 1732) and; "Practice is actual performance distinguished from theory." (p. 1291). Although these are general definitions, Jarvis' (1990: 338) definitions from an adult educator's perspective coincide with these above. However, he further separates the two, asserting that theory focuses on knowledge that comes from theoretical analysis, and practice focuses on knowledge that arises from empirical evidence through the senses.

Needless to say, with this separation between theory and practice there have been few attempts, in the general field of adult education as well as specifically in the preparation of adult educators, to bring theory and practice together in any coherent way. Nevertheless, expressions of concern and discontent abound from adults, both adult educators and the general adult populace involved in learning experiences, which imply, if not directly assert the importance of addressing this. These expressions take the form of: "Why do adult educators violate everything they know about how adults learn?" or, "Why don't we adult educators practice on ourselves what we theorize about how adults learn?" or, "Why should I stay in that session and tolerate being talked 'down to' like a little child?" or, "Please, no more long lectures!" or, "I want to 'actively participate' in learning rather than just 'passively receive' teaching!"

However, the separateness of theory and practice by their definitions, juxtaposed with the concerns and discontent on their separateness in actual practice, may not be enough justification to warrant making a connection. After all, in fairness, there are many positive comments and evaluations that are made on adult education programs as they are currently being conducted. But there is another aspect to this paper which could help justify bridging the gap. This paper is to be limited to a curriculum based discussion about the theory and practice of the preparation of educators of adults. Consequently, a definition of curriculum may shed some additional light on the possibility of a connection between theory and practice being needed.

Curriculum in general is considered to be (Devlin 1939: 414) applied particularly to the course of study in a university, college, or school. Jarvis (1990: 89) in relating the curriculum to adult education, finds denial of adult education having a curriculum as well as identification of curriculum with the term programme. He does suggest that curriculum tends to mean the entire range of learning experiences provided by an educational institution.

A much clearer articulation of the particulars which "learning experiences" encompass is given by Knoll (1989, in Titmus: 29) using the German Education Council definition that curriculum means the organized arrangement of learning processes and content with regard to certain aims and objectives which include techniques, behavior or type and degree of certain skills and aptitudes, or of knowledge. This could imply and prompt such questions as: which knowledge, understanding, aptitudes, skills, interests, attitude, value and behavior pattern is this "learner—who is an educator of adults in preparation" to acquire? With which subject matter and content is this "learner" to be confronted? What is the "learner" to learn? When and where is this "learner" to learn? How are this "learner's " needs to be determined? By which learning steps and techniques, in which manner, with the aid of which materials is this "learner" to learn? How is the attainment of the aims and objectives by this "learner" to be determined? It could be assumed that to answer these questions will necessitate knowing various theories and schools of thought which will inform the selection of the very best practices or learning/teaching techniques which the educator of adults has at his/her command and level of competency.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

One of the earliest references outlining the preparation of educators of adults (Houle, in Jensen 1964: 69-83) makes no mention of a connection between theory and practice. In the standards for graduate adult

education programs which appeared in 1986 (Brookfield 1988: 234-241) the connection is very loosely made by indicating that the full-time adult education faculty member needs a continuing commitment to adult education theory, research, and knowledge of current practice. It should be noted that no connection between theory and practice in the faculty classroom behavior is indicated or required.

Comparing university adult education in England and the USA, (Taylor 1985: Preface) theory and practice are mentioned regarding the liberal school of thought in relation to the general field of adult education with no reference to preparing educators of adults. Knapper (1985: 106-120) outlines some innovative instructional methods which could be practiced by educators of adults thought by some to be consistent with adult

learning theories that emphasize a high degree of learner participation. Although Bright (1989: Title) addresses the theory and practice issue, the argument is limited to the study of adult education in its relationship to epistemology. Usher (1989: Title) takes the view that theory and practice are not inextricably connected, but in a captive triangle with research. His argument is directed toward the adult education field in general, but can be applied to preparing educators of adults.

Moreover, McCullough (1987: 53) supports the connection by indicating that the professional development of an adult educator/trainer will be greatly advanced by letting others know what competencies (which are identified by the theory) you are trying to improve and asking for feedback on your progress. Collins (1991: 21-39) on the other hand, argues that the preparation of educators of adults is not helped by the current obsession with technique without the vocational commitment to engagement in critical, ethical, and political issues. Outlining the changing relationships between theory and practice during nearly thirty years, Cervero (1991, in Peters: 19-41) asserts that currently there is a great disparity between theory and practice in preparing educators of adults, frustrating practitioners while at the same time concerning theoreticians.

Perhaps the earliest published statement of support for a theory and practice alliance in preparing educators of adults came from Knowles in 1962 (1991, in Dixon: 18-19) and (1988, in Brookfield: 43-49) with the publication of *A General Theory of the Doctorate in Education*. The purpose of the theory would provide guidelines for the development of a program (curriculum) for each degree. This theory was later enhanced (fleshed-out) and implemented by Knowles in the graduate programs in preparing adult educators at both Boston University and North Carolina State University. A few specific enhancements were published on Knowles' theory of andragogy—which he defines as the art and science of helping adults learn (1980: 1-63), competency rating scale (1990: 236-243), and self-directed learning (1975: 1-135). Beyond the publications, Knowles, the adult educator, seemed to exemplify as a co-learner and a facilitator of learning in others, the theory and practice connection in the curriculum he developed for preparing educators of adults.

The ideas of how adults learn which were included, but not limited to these statements, said that adults have a desire and capacity for: Actively participating in the learning process, being treated as "grown-ups" instead of as "children", engaging in a variety of experiential learning techniques, discussion time being allotted in conjunction with a lecture if one is given, interaction with others in small groupings that helps them internalize information, hands-on practice, opportunity for each to share his/her expertise with others, raising questions about and exploring problems and various possibilities of practical application, self-directedness in learning, knowing exactly what step to take next in learning, innovation, excitement to carry a new idea forward, openness to new insights, an attitude of caring about what happens to students, clarity about differences between process and content; in short, meeting the adult learners' learning needs as they perceive and understanding them, as well as congruence between saying and doing in education: i.e. making the medium and the message coincide.

## A CASE EXAMPLE

Cervero (1991, in Peters: 36) points out that although the relationship between theory and practice is an issue that will not be resolved, we should set our sights on understanding and being critical of the circumstances that shape our actions about this issue. Thus, it could help clarify for the reader, the viewpoint of this author, to state that he received his doctorate in adult education at Boston University during Knowles' years there. Additionally, what will be presented regarding this influence supports the axiom that we teach how we have been taught. Consequently, the remainder of this paper is not intended to and will not resolve the relationship of theory and practice in the preparing of educators or adults. However, this paper is meant to be descriptive of some ways which one person prepared as an educator of adults in the



1960's, has "played out" this relationship in the nearly three subsequent decades with the stated point of view, without trying to speak for others and their varying perspectives on the theory and practice connection. Thus, what follows includes not only the ideas on how adults learn set forth in the last paragraph of the previous section, but also will add special ideas applied and used in each program described.

The contextual setting of this adult educator's perspective is in his dual role as a continuing learner of how to become an educator of adults and as a facilitator of helping others become educators of adults. He has a split appointment position, at the University of Missouri, of Associate Professor of Education with masters and doctoral adult education students at the St. Louis campus, and Continuing Education Specialist in University Extension serving the individual and organizational learning needs of the general adult population. The University Extension position has been fulfilled in both rural and urban Missouri.

The earliest and most effective educational and innovative experiences of this educator of adults becoming a faculty member with University Extension was to participate in an inservice education orientation program for a seven week period. It was highly individualized. One could "shadow" other specialists as they worked and daily operationalized the role of University Extension faculty. Theory and practice were congruent. It was preparatory to the process that would be expected when one worked in the field setting in a very self-directed manner to implement her/his own ideas. This became a viewpoint expressed by Pinchot (1985: 22) when describing an entrepreneur, in which he suggested, that the one excited about an idea be responsible to carry it forward in the organization. However, this was counter to the apparent viewpoint of Hays (1993: 173-186) when she seems to question the appropriateness of educators confronting learners with that kind of responsibility without having first determined their stage of readiness. However, Knowles (1975: 31-38) emphasized that in his redefining the role of teacher, from content transmitter to facilitator of self-directed learning, he was in charge of the process, instead of the content, and would make decisions about procedures when the students couldn't, as well as helping them learn to take more responsibility for their learning.

During the first year of University Extension work, participation by this educator of adults in a program planning conference was required. The most striking part was a presentation on "The Forty-Seven Principles of Adult Learning", and the presenter violated every one of them. It seemed like the message was, "Do as I say, not as I do". Reischmann (1993: Forthcoming) in arguing for maintaining pedagogy and against instituting andragogy states, "The blames made against pedagogy often blame a poor practice, not a poor theory. In theories I have never read that learners should be treated childishly, dependent, not respected." That is just the point this author is arguing against: make theory and practice congruent; model the theory to the greatest possible extent in every situation.

One of University Extension's educational goals consistent with adult learning theory is to develop programs/curriculums which respond to the needs of the adult people being served. Consequently, when rural nurse educators asked if they could have help with developing quality health care continuing education programs that would meet state relicensure requirements, the response of this educator of adults was to try. The result was that from 1975 to 1977 a need assessment and program development was conducted and a local steering committee of nurse educators was established. From 1977 to the present forty-eight one day workshops on different topics have been conducted in northwest Missouri which meet the criteria originally asked. The workshops draw an average attendance of sixty-eight and draw participants not only from Missouri, but Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska as well. The steering committee mechanism for planning and implementing has continued to function, despite the Continuing Education Specialist moving away and another University Extension specialist taking up the responsibility of helping the nurses/health care educator professionals obtain their goals. (Henschke, 1988: 52-57)

One day in the late 1970's a member of the Superior General's Council of a local Roman Catholic Convent of fifty-five sisters headquartered in northwest Missouri contacted this author to ask if they could obtain University Extension help with a planning conference. The Superior General and Council fulfill the teaching, leadership, and management functions for the remainder of the convent. This request was during the era of the downward trend in convent enrollments. As we probed the purpose for the inquiry, survival of the convent in the future was the real question on their minds, since their average age was increasing with no new entrants in more than a decade. We established an educational consulting relationship. Various educational events and consultations were held which lasted for seventy-five days over a two and one-half year period. Self-directed learning, self-determination, organizational decision-making, conflict resolution, leadership, and becoming intentional were major topics which were worked through with their General Council as well as total group. The most important concern on this consultant's mind was what Dirkx calls,

the tacit dimension of practical knowledge (1986, in Henschke, 1987b: 419), and Henschke (1987b: 420) describes as knowing what needs to be done in this specific situation to take the next step which will carry the learning forward. The result for the convent was the formation of a new, vibrant, forward looking convent with a group of sisters they had broke away from fifty years previously.

In the early 1980's, this author was named associate professor of education in the adult education area at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Responsibilities include teaching graduate courses on preparing educators of adults, guiding and chairing masters' and doctoral students' programs, researching and publishing, as well as providing service to the university and the community. The courses taught regularly in rotation are: Foundations of Adult Education, Improvement of Instruction in Adult Education, and Curriculum Theory and Development in Adult Education. Classes are competency based (Henschke, In Dixon, 1991: 9). Learning contracts are used (Knowles, 1975: 62-63). The classes are live laboratories for learning using various adult learning techniques to involve all the class interactively as illustrated by the genre of Leypoldt (1967: 1-125) and many other sources, based and generated in research and/or practice (Rose, in Henschke, 1992a, 10), (Henschke, 1987a: 55-61). The schools of thought or educational philosophies guiding the class processes are a mixture of humanistic, progressive, radical, behavioristic, liberal, and analytic (Elias, 1980: 1-12), in that order of emphasis. There is a high degree of trust in the learning abilities of the students (Henschke, 1989: 81-87). A critique by and feedback from students is always requested at the completion of each semester course to identify suggestions for improvement which are implemented the next time the course is offered (McCullough, 1987: 53).

Conversations with adult education colleagues have resulted in debates whether it is appropriate to put into practice the adult learning theories in university graduate courses, resulting in such comments as: "This is a university, you can't do that here; other professors would not tolerate our doing this; and, academic rigor would be sacrificed." (also Hays, 1993: 173-186). Discussions with professors in the Department of Educational Studies, where adult education is placed at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, have resulted in the conclusion that no quality or rigor need be or is sacrificed as adult learning principles are practiced in the graduate courses. In fact, the adult learning theories are in concert with and supported by the school of education's official knowledge base statement which is required to be included in all course syllabi. The statement reads, "Teacher-A lifelong learner who creates learning settings where students are guided to construct meaning in concert with the teacher and other learners." Some results of long term impact evaluations (Henschke, 1990: 61) from past participants in the adult education graduate program indicate, but are not limited to, such gains as: New skill, new insights from hearing experts and other students, increased thinking ability, increased personal confidence, and greater satisfaction from the people they serve.

All of the elements included in the University of Missouri graduate adult education programs above, are also part of other credit and non-credit programs conducted by this author in the preparing of educators of adults in other contexts with some special additions and adaptations for each situation.

A credit course on Foundations of Adult Basic Education was offered on video satellite nationally over a two and one-half month time period in 1990 with thirty-nine enrolling from eight states. An interactive element was added by interspersing four-one hour audio telephone conferences for participants to discuss various learnings and applications of the course content in their own settings. Five percent of the telephone time was occupied by the professor asking questions of the participants regarding how they were applying the course in their work contexts as educators of adults. This five percent generated response and interaction among them as well as interchange of ideas to their benefit professionally, which occupied twenty-four percent of the telephone time. (Lane 1990: 89-93).

Seminars and conference sessions focusing on adult learning have been provided for both full and part time educators of adults. These have been of various lengths: From forty-five minutes up to four hours. They have been implemented with adult basic educators, nurse educators, educational developers in church international ministries, church educational leaders in eight countries on three continents, and conferees at state, regional, national and international conferences. Without exception, the sessions designed and conducted to include both adult learning theory and practice of the theory, received positive feedback from participants on giving attention to both aspects (Henschke, 1992a&b: All pages). A major suggestion for those adult educators who would desire to move in the direction of making their theory and practice congruent is this: Make the commitment, identify how you will link theory and practice in each situation, stay the course, don't look back, but move forward.

An advanced graduate credit course on Methods and Techniques for Teaching Adults was conducted in 1991 with professional adult educators on a telephone network with sixty-five people at twenty-two locations in one state. The interactive element was assured (no interaction on a teleconference equals grinding learning to a halt!) with twelve groups forming to make presentations which required each group to involve the full class actively (not passively) in the presentation/learning experience. Incidentally, they "pulled it off."

A graduate credit course on Teaching Adults in University Extension was provided by this educator of adults in 1991 & 1992 to University Extension personnel in two states in two different formats: A four-weekend, consecutively on Friday nights and all day Saturdays; and, four consecutive days in one week and three consecutive days two months later. Each format worked equally well and the subject matter was applicable in both contexts.

A credit course was offered, by a team of this and another educator of adults, within a prison on preparing adult literacy tutors who are prison residents to function as tutors with other inmates. The twenty-four participants effectively took active responsibility for their own learning and had no difficulty in supporting each other in the process (Henschke & Perry, 1989: 89-95).

Two different non-credit forty-hour inservice education courses on Methods and Techniques for Teaching Adults were conducted by this educator of adults with adult educators in Brazil: Forty participants in 1985, and twenty participants in 1991. Each group also participated in the design of their course (Henschke, 1987b: 414-422). Their perceptions at the beginning of its not being in touch with their reality, changed to their feeling at the conclusion that each course was very relevant to them and their real world.

A video-conference series of ten four-hour sessions on Total Quality Management was conducted with forty-four participants from twenty-three corporations located within a major metropolitan area. An interactive element managed by various facilitators was added to allow discussion time and time for sharing ideas for local applications throughout the sessions. This educator of adults trained the facilitators. Evaluation by the video-conference session participants indicated the most beneficial aspect of the series was the interaction among the people from various corporations which generated ideas to use as well as apply in their own work settings.

It is interesting to note that in the conference where an earlier version of this paper was presented, the structure of the paper presentation sessions supported theory and practice congruence. Instructions given to paper presenters by the conference organizers included: you have ninety minutes for your session; don't read the full text of your paper to your session participants; take five to ten minutes at most to present a capsule of what your paper says; then, let discussion occupy the remaining time. This author wondered if that would work. For his own session as well as sessions of other author/presenters he attended, much to his delight the full time was occupied by productive interaction. Even more time for each session could have been beneficial. It certainly exemplified the notion that adults value active participation in their learning experiences.

## SUMMARY

This paper has provided clarification of the terms theory, practice, and curriculum relating to adult education. It has also addressed the issue of theory and practice connection regarding the curriculum of preparing educators of adults; traced some historical background of this issue which some think will not be resolved, and, provided a case illustration of how one educator of adults, prepared in an academic curriculum not only supportive of the theory and practice connection, but also advocated congruence between the two. In addition, the case illustration describes how that educator of adults worked on the theory and practice issue in his professional context as he has continued to learn as well as facilitate the preparation of educators of adults. In closing, it highlights the theory and practice congruence insisted on, in the structure of the paper sessions, by the conference organizers where an earlier version of this paper was presented. Whether this will add to the discussion and clarification of the issue remains to be seen. However, others are invited and encouraged to share in and contribute to the ongoing debate by verbal means as well as written publication.

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