Introduction

As Draper (2001) and Reischmann (2005) have observed, the evolution of the adult education world has been one where waves of thought and debate about its purpose and methodologies and philosophies have converged to create a truly multifaceted field. This diversity is also one of the field's strengths as it can serve an array of adults in different stages of their lives through a variety of settings, agencies and organizations, delivery methods, and instructional strategies or practices.

Selman, Selman, Cooke & Dampier (1998) distilled the process of adult education down to the interplay of the following: participants, providers, and participation. Within this, participation is the link, an active push and pull effort between participant, the learner, and the provider, the agency or adult educator. While the latter is 'sympathetic to adult learners' and the former 'with learning needs unique to their individual situations,' participation is ultimately, based on 'adults exercising their free will' (Selman et al., 1998). Adult education, involving human needs, is therefore portrayed as organic, vital and even further qualified by Selman et al. (1998) as 'full of passion.' This sentiment seems to be evident throughout most of our introductory course readings albeit the 'passion' depends on how one views the roles and locus of control of the learning process between learner and adult educator, and the overall purpose of adult education.

As I reflect on my roles as both 'participant' and 'provider' of adult education, the themes of individual personal development, self-direction, and free will in learning; to learn, reflect, do or not do, compel me to consider my perspective about adult education as being fundamentally humanistic, primarily experiential, and somewhat conflicted.

Roots of Self-Directed and Experiential Learning

Stewart (1987) provides us with insights into the context and underlying assumptions upon which Eduard Lindeman wrote his humanistic beliefs about the need for education to be more than preparation for a vocation; it was to be 'life-centered.' One of Lindeman's axioms that 'education is life...and life is education,' contends Stewart (1987), is nonsensical; yet like a Zen koan, it has served a purpose and prompted thoughtful discussion among its practitioners about the nature and intent of adult education.

For Lindeman, there was to be no separation or break in the life-cycle of learning over the course of one's adult life; he envisioned adult education to be founded through situations not subjects. As Stewart (1987) explains, Lindeman espoused that 'adult education in part could take place anywhere' and furthermore, that one's learning goals should be non-vocational, focused on finding meaning in life from one's own experiences. The assumptions central to Lindeman's holistic adult education model of autonomy through self-directed learning, and learning through experience, have also informed adult learning theories proposed by Knowles, who went on to popularize the self-directed, autonomous nature of adult learning and consideration of adults' prior learning experiences (Cranton, 2013).

Lindeman emphasized the central role of adults' participation in the learning process, and for me, self-directed and experiential learning theories of adult education articulate this perspective that reinforces the individual, and the unique nature of learning. As such, these theories resonate as a source for the practices (appealing to learner control and reflection) in the work that I design as an adult educator and also what I value in my experience as an adult learner.

Reflection: Learning from Experience

From Reischmann (2005) we learn about the tug between 'art and science' and 'doing' and 'reflecting' that underpins the work of adult education theorists and practitioners. As Cranton (2013) alludes, the branches of experiential learning are varied, and experiential can mean 'a variety of things.' In the humanist tradition, learning is a process of discovery and experimentation where the responsibility for learning is placed on the learner who is at the center of the experience. This aligns with what Lindeman proposed, that experience should be the source of knowledge and the content of the learning curriculum (Stewart, 1987). As learners reflect on their experiences and take ownership of it, they gain knowledge which is authentic because it is true to their world view.

Reflection, often conceptualized as a rational analytical process through which human beings 'extract knowledge from their experience' (Jordi, 2011), as a practice or strategy varies in its application within adult education theories. As described by Cranton (2013), Kolb's experiential learning model consists of four phases, one of which is to apply new learning. The cognitive act or perception of reflection is not enough in this model; something must be done with it, as in an opportunity to reflectively apply new learning with others. This practice of using groups and discussion to openly reflect and construct knowledge with others can also be traced back to Lindeman, as Stewart (1987) describes how he acted as a facilitator to help study groups draw on their own experiences to learn.

In my work as an adult educator, designing discussion activities whether in a face-to-face classroom or in online communities is an essential instructional strategy to draw out learners' experiences and help them gain meaning and learn from one another, or simply encourage

individual reflection. But not all experience, in my view, has to lead to action. As an adult learner, I see learning as essentially an internal cognitive process regulated by the individual; shaped by other influences, whether that is an instructor, a group or society, but steered by the individual who establishes and maintains their own goals and interests and strives to make meaning of their experiences.

Autonomy: A link between paradigms?

With the concept of self-directed learning, the focus is on attributes of learners who learn at their own pace and interest, and can assume greater responsibility for, and take charge, of their own learning. Cranton (2013), citing the work of Candy, provides more depth to the self-directed learning concept by bringing in dimensions of personal autonomy, self-management, learner control, and autodidaxy; dimensions which suggest that the adult educator is redundant or is not active in the learning process. However, like other approaches to adult learning, self-directed learning can be viewed on a 'participation' continuum where the learner can be more intentional and assume more control and independence of his or her learning (Selman et al., 1998), be involved with collaboration or group work, or be directed by an adult educator. Still there is a view that as self-directed learning is learning primarily done independently by the learner, its outcome is therefore inherently cognitive and as a result, does not support societal or emancipatory concerns of adult education (Cranton, 2013).

This aspect of self-directed learning is where my humanistic perspective on adult education becomes conflicted. I recognize that self-directed learning can be viewed as a primarily cognitive activity; focused on the learner's internal reaction to learning as sense-

making. However, if critical reflection, working creatively and the ability to create one's own meaning and challenge ideas and theories does not yield in outwardly supporting societal or emancipatory concerns, does that make it any less important? What if one were to accept that autonomy or self-directed learning is a departure from adult education as a social process, but also one that redistributes power in the construction of knowledge and participant and providers roles in the learning process and thereby, supports emancipatory learning goals? Both paradigms, that self-directed learning is individualistic in nature and can also be political, is supported through Lindeman's writings.

Stewart (1987) offers that Lindeman's assumption that the learner's experience is the highest value resource in adult education is his 'boldest statement.' By putting learner experience before subject matter, along with his reference to the 'non-vocational' personal development goals of adult education, Lindeman championed autonomy and free will in adult education, and to me, it speaks to an underlying value of being able to experience freedom of thought; wholly compatible with the central ideas put forward in John Stuart Mill's essays on democracy. Stewart (1987) further alludes to this mix of values in Lindeman's writings when he refers to the changing, informal nature of the relationship between the teacher and learner as being 'democratic territory.'

Self-directed learning offers adult learning practitioners a way to explain autonomy in adult education. Is it individualistic? Political? All of the above? With such diversity in terms of the variability of how people interpret their experience, I return to my earlier declaration that my perspective on adult education is primarily experiential, definitely humanistic, and now less conflicted. A humanist and experiential outlook best honours Lindeman's ideas that

participation in learning should be non-coercive, left up to the individual to experiment, grow and contribute to society in whatever capacity they see fit.

Conclusion

The questions as to what fundamental purpose does adult education serve and who is the change agent in adult education, force adult education practitioners to frame our theories, practices and assumptions about adult learning. Learning theories are practical in that way, making us test and reflect on our assumptions about the nature of learning and knowledge, and 'to interpret, to make sense of practices' (Edwards, 2005). I conclude that the process of adult education - participation - is multifaceted and offers opportunities for both learner and adult educator to respond to their own needs to understand and make sense of the world and their place in it. It is a view I gravitate towards; to put goals of individual and personal development as a primary driver in adult education, but as outlined, it's been a source of dissonance too.

As Plumb and Welton (2001) remind us, "experience cannot always be trusted" in adult education; that is, personal experience is tied to culture and the language we use to describe adult education, and this frames our conceptual frameworks and theories about it. I acknowledge the limitations of my perspective or "personal foundation of experience." However, I hope through further readings of this course and dialogue with other students to be moved towards learning and using a new lexicon of adult education, one that will that illuminate more clearly a purpose beyond learner autonomy and free will, and deepen my understanding of the multiple roles assumed by the adult educator.

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