

The 21st Century Educator: Strategic and Consultative Partner

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Abstract

We are living in a state of great flux. Needless to say, political, social, economic, and technological structures are changing faster than we can name and define them. As educators, we are called upon to ready adults for the challenges brought on by global changes. Educators in the 21st Century are no longer knowledge producers and disseminators. Educators are involved in managing the educational process; their own and that of the adult students.

Educational leadership in the knowledge society is evidenced with a curiously mixed set of skills; it is defined by emotional intelligence and spirituality; it is defined by the finely honed ability of facilitating learning in cross-cultural, multi-lingual, and inter-disciplinary settings; it is defined by a willingness to move away from the guru-stance of teaching and toward a praxis of partnering for change. Today's educator ought to be a strategic partner and consultant in the lifelong and life wide process of learning. With this essay, the authors begin to explore the multi-dimensional role of educational leadership in the 21st Century.

What Has Adult Education To Do With Learning?

We are living in a state of global flux. Political, social, economic, and technological structures are changing faster than we can name and define them. Cornel West (1999) once wrote, "The existential quest for meaning and the political struggle for freedom sit at the center of my thought." As educators, we often claim our role to be that

of facilitating the kind of learning adults need for their life's quests. As part of the effort to play our role well, we have developed an abundance of theories and written scores of books on learning. Correspondingly, tomes of instructions on how to facilitate such learning exist in our field. We marvel at the latest technologies in our trade, and then apply the tools marvelously. Collectively, we seem to be of a mindset that, in order to play our role, we must produce and disseminate knowledge, or at least disseminate ways of meaning-making and support adults in their lifelong learning.

Karoly & Panis (2004) forecast of the "dramatic" consequences for learning due to the changes occurring in contemporary life meets with Jarvis' (2001) earlier confirmation that the role of the educator has been redefined as facilitator of learning. In 2000, Aronowitz passionately had made clear that the adult education industry finds itself in the midst of dynamic changes and that adult educators must navigate the turbulence by adapting their roles. They were inspired by the shiny currency of recurrent education. Adult educators set out to ready adults for challenges and possibilities ushered in by such change. We lead the charge toward social change by means of education. We embraced the maverick's role. And we still do it--by way of facilitating learning.

We posit, that adult educators' leadership in today's knowledge society ought to be evidenced with a curious mix of skills; by emotional intelligence and spirituality; defined by critically examined experience; by mindful reflection on assumptions and values; and gauged by the finely honed ability of facilitating learning in cross-cultural, multi-lingual, and inter-disciplinary settings. Educators must be willing to move away from the guru-stance of teaching subjects toward praxis of partnering with others for change. The 21st Century educator ought to be strategic partner, consultant, and process manager in leading people as they go about lifelong and life wide learning.

The Subject and Object of Adult Education:

The field of adult education has claimed to have a closer connection to and a deeper understanding of adults and their lifelong learning endeavors than have traditional

education structures like colleges and universities³. “Our concern has been with the difference, a major one, between how faculty and students view and understand the learning/teaching process,” claimed Dai Hounsell back in 1987 (Smith et al., p.113) about the field. By the 1980s, adult education had been firmly established as a field in the USA, albeit one without a unified voice as to its purpose and goals. And yet, the common denominator of any adult education endeavor, whether formal or informal, has always been the adult.

Irrespective of the various aims and objectives claimed by the workers in this field (Darkenwald and Merriam. 1982), adult educators seemed to agree with what Knowles had predicted in 1964; namely, that this movement called adult education might be the educational frontier of the 20th century and beyond. Andragogues, to use the terminology for adult educators introduced in the USA by Lindeman (1926) and popularized by Knowles, distinguished themselves from pedagogues in their approaches to facilitating learning. Sets of principles and beliefs about how adults learn originated in both the emergent humanist and critical stance toward conventional education models. Interest in defining and, consequently, developing techniques for facilitating adults’ learning grew profusely from that era on.⁴ What should distinguish adult educators’ ways of *educating* is our commitment to facilitating the learning, or, as Stanage (1998) put it, the “leading forth” of adults according to their expressed goals. Instead, we keep adding to a grab bag, expanding the repertoires of techniques and strategies, and adding tools and toys.

We continue to teach subjects instead of adults. We measure this learning in standardized ways and award certificates, diplomas and degrees, symbolizing that another adult has been educated. We reiterate with this that the dualistic notion that a superior knowledge or universal truth exists, no matter how vigorously we may “discourse” about the content and goal of adult education in our field. With this, it is the adult educator who

³ This statement rests on the premise that we agree that *adult education* has a particular knowledge base, with an identifiable history and a distinguishing philosophical framework, all of which has traditionally differed from institutions and structures that also educate adults (e.g., colleges, trade schools, and corporate training departments).

⁴ The scope of this essay is too narrow to do even a smidgen of justice to the rich histories – both written and unwritten – of adult education in the USA. The reader is encouraged to consider the point illustrated with this brief statement; i.e., that adult education, in its myriad manifestations, established sets of principles particular to this field. At the time, these principles of adult learning and corresponding techniques of facilitating learning were cutting edge and unique. Today, much of this knowledge base has become mainstream education/training fare, even when its originators are not credited.

continues to constrain adults learning within relatively static structures and systems. Yet, adult educators within the broader knowledge base of adult education are well poised to shift the paradigm and lead toward appropriate adult education practices during this great moment of flux.

Back to the Future

Within the field, the construct *learning* remains multi-layered and varied in its interpretation, depending on the philosophical framework of the respective adult educator. The focus may be on learning style, learner needs, and strategies of information exchange or social justice, among others. The discourse centers *learning* on critically analyzing the learner's experience of learning (Brookfield. 1995:226) or makes *learning* synonymous with education (Marsick. 1998). *Learning* is, indeed, explored richly within the field of adult education and problematized in many ways. The fascinating aspect here is that adult educators no more than scientists in other fields really know how *learning* works. As was once impishly stated, adult education's learning theories are based on studies of the behavior of pigeons and small North American mammals. We have not come much closer to theoretically grounding this construct in theories within our particular field. However, we have established learning-how-to-learn concepts (Smith. 1987) and transformational learning concepts (1997) and women's ways of knowing concepts (Belenkey. 1986), for example. We have much information about *learning* and a collective experience in supporting adults learning. We have several traditions within our field, from the radical humanism of Knowles to the humanist radicalism of Freire (1971), that chronicle roles of adult educators, which point the way to the role an educator of adults in the 21st century ought to play.

Ways of Knowing & Knowing Ways: Skills of the 21st Century Learner

Forecasters discuss the changing skill set for adults in terms of needed changes in education and training delivery mechanisms that empower adults to meet contemporary life's challenges. Roco's (2002) simple words should have adult educators hasten to assess the state of affairs in adult education when he says that "new" technologies are becoming obsolete and incredible technologies, such as nanotechnology, are emerging at amazing paces." Ryan reminded us (1994) us that "we are on the threshold of a new age -

a high tech information age where there is the greatest explosion of knowledge in the history of mankind. Information is proliferating at a phenomenal rate and information processing has become the backbone of a whole new era. Storing, retrieving, creating, distributing and exchanging information, using tools of high technology, are now important aspects of our economy and the foci of many jobs which did not exist a decade ago.” Much of the jobs in such services and the Ryan saw forthcoming, have already come and gone. Yet, we are still skilling adults in obsolete computer skills in vocational training programs, and most of our institutions of adult and higher education barely have up-to-date equipment and CTI knowledge. Adult educators, given the current structures of our institutions, cannot possibly maintain an edge on the skills in this fast, vastly changing knowledge society to lead in teaching them. Continued development is needed as much for the teacher as for the student in our times. Moreover, as Hayes and Wynyard (2002) caution, “the training of the mind is no longer the central role for academics, who are now in the business of ensuring that their teaching has a vocational ethos.” We have to acknowledge that employment opportunities remain key criteria for adults for the selection of education programs; and retraining, re-skilling, or assisting adults with recurrent education is a task for adult educators. It is debatable whether or not the education field has thus far adequately responded to the vocational training needs of adults, who are seeking to better their lives through education. Yet, in a knowledge-based economy a premium will be placed on educational systems that rapidly respond to the ever-changing learning needs demanded by the transforming global dynamics.

Chen (2003) ponders “contextual multiple intelligences.” His expansion of Howard Gardners’ concept of multiple intelligences far outpaces the original learning style considerations discussed in the field of adult education in the 1970s. Chen makes the case that adults in this century will be called upon to develop and apply new tech skills *as much as* gaining a different understanding of knowledge and intelligence within an interdependent, global context. Adults will need to be versed in ways of knowing within a global, intercultural, and interdisciplinary context. Problem-solving, communication, and working in diverse teams are skills increasingly required at all levels of work and life (Karoly & Panis. 2004).

Educators will need to foster cognitive, affective, physical, and intuitive knowing in the lifelong learner if adults are to keep up with change. Today's technologies and global changes give society the impetus to align its expectations with respect to learning and knowledge and leadership to meet the challenges. Knowles predicted adult education to be the movement to watch in the 20th century; internationally, we are clamoring for interdependence and a learning orientation in our educational programs (UNESCO, 2003). At this time, we have a window of opportunity for adult educators to step up to the plate.

The Adult Educator: Not A Negligent Species

The literature on the notion of a paradigm shift to a knowledge economy offers a plethora of possibilities on how institutions of learning may embrace changes in their structures and attitudes. It is the adult educator, however, who can become a pivotal force during this time of transition. It is the adult educator who has the experience of being on the margins of resources, status, and clarity of purpose and role in a knowledge society. Adult education workers have long come from many philosophical orientations; utilized many teaching approaches; and toiled in the field of adult education in many non-conventional ways. Therefore, adult educators ought to be able to create ways of becoming partners with the adult learners that help adults become “[...] perceptive, flexible, creative, adaptable and, most of all, able to solve problems and make decisions in a multiplicity of personal and professional situations as yet unimagined” (Ryan, 1994). The 21st Century educator will be a strategic partner, a knowledgeable consultant, a process manager, a leader, and a self-aware human. In that, these kind of adult educators take on the high-risk task of becoming transactional and transformational leaders.

Roles and Characteristics of The 21st Century Adult Educator

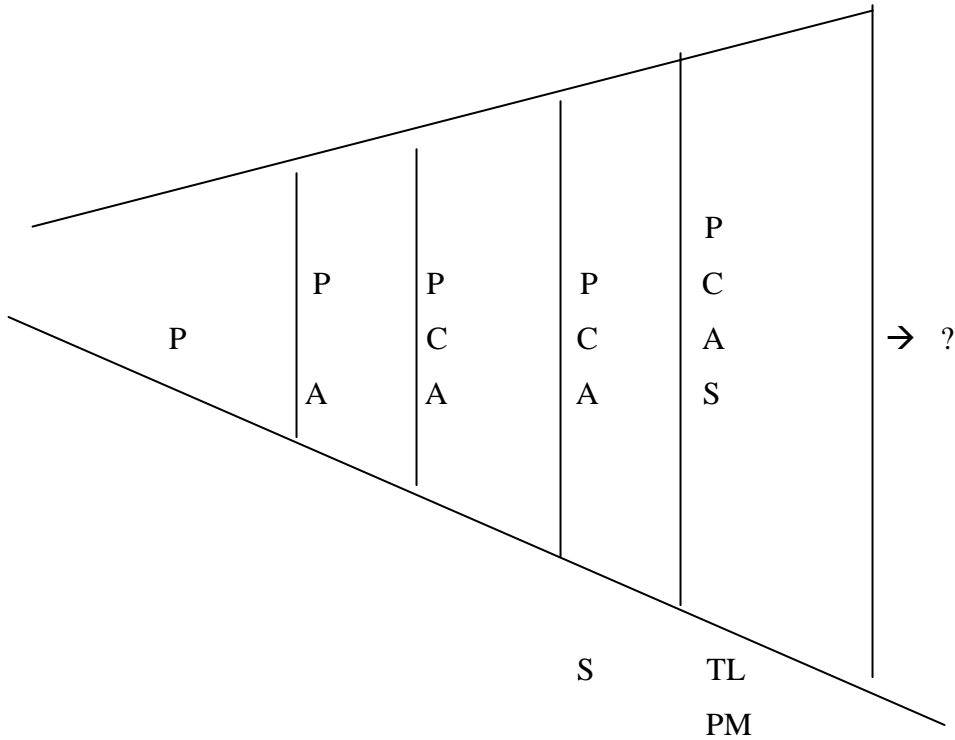
Adult educators in the new paradigm establish an atmosphere conducive to decision making. The decision-making process involves the possibility of change. Mezirow (2000) states almost any change in life creates feelings of uncertainty and

doubt. Educators must establish a relationship with learners in which these feelings can be discussed: an atmosphere conducive to change. Kurt Lewin (1951) in his research on how people change has determined that before a change is accepted, there must occur an unfreezing of the person's present belief system. This unfreezing will be facilitated when the person has the opportunity to openly express loyalty and allegiance to the old beliefs and the fear and doubt of changing beliefs.

Change entails both: allegiance to the old way and fear and doubt about the new. Adult learners need an opportunity to talk openly about their concerns. As a result, the adult educator must be skilled in non-judgmental listening. Only then will the adult learners feel comfortable raising these questions. In the traditional model, these questions are considered "objections to overcome." This conveys to the learner the message either that their feelings about change are wrong or that the teacher has all the answers. It stifles the flow of open, honest communication necessary for building committed partnerships.

In our traditional education models, educators "talk a lot" and create and show their knowledge. Educators have been programmed to believe that they must have the answers. Given this positionality (Taylor & Tisdell, 1999), it is difficult for teachers to understand the importance of just listening to the concerns of students and not taking action to overcome them. When such concerns are not allowed to surface, or when they are brought up and denied, they have power to sabotage the relationship. Once doubt is brought to the surface and treated as valid, its power to impede the change process goes away. It is such a climate of openness and interdependence that can pave the way for new learning in the 21st Century, supported by a new kind of adult educator.

A Sketch of the Key Aspects of the Learning Relationship



← → Directive ← → Collaborative ← → Independent ← → Interdependent ← →

P: Pedagogy A: Andragogy C: Consultative S: Strategic Partner
 PM: Process Manager TL: Transactional/Transformational Leader

The previous graphic sketches key aspects of the adult educator’s roles, characteristics, and the scope of the learning process for both teacher and student. It is built on the following values and assumptions:

- The teacher-student relationship has a process-driven focus. With this, both acknowledge that there is no one best approach but rather that the teaching approach must fit the learning task at hand.
- Since student and teacher are seen in partnership, which exists regardless of where on the spectrum the learner stands at any point in time with respect to a learning task, both select the most appropriate approach. Collaboration is a value intrinsic to any approach.

- ❑ The movement between directiveness to interdependence is reflexive, depending on the learning task, and is selected based on the readiness of the student. Readiness is defined as that combination of knowledge, skill, and reflected upon experience that a student brings to the task.
- ❑ Teacher-student roles are viewed as interchangeable and there is an acceptance of valuing the 21st century educator as a transformational leader between paradigms

The pedagogical approach (P), at the point of a directive stance of the teacher works in learning situation where the student lacks the readiness to engage in the learning task at hand that leads to learning goals. Adult students returning to graduate school, for example, may find themselves ill-equipped to cope with so-termed academic writing and willingly benefit from workshops on preparing for graduate level course work. Here, expecting self-directedness at the point when a student ventures into unknown learning tasks would be equivalent to giving a person a sailboat, an instructional manual, and a nautical map and ask them to start sailing across Lake Michigan.

Once a certain level of readiness prevails, the andragogical approach (A) calls on the teacher to engage the student in the decision-making process. Students can now determine how and when to learn certain tasks and collaboratively move through the learning process with the teacher. In the sailing example, this may play out after basic sail setting techniques have been mastered and students can choose what navigational skills to work on. The student can take more responsibility and learn independently from manuals and maps in preparation of further instruction. In this example, the movement from pedagogical/directive to andragogical/self-directed approaches is iterative and the teacher has assumed more of a consultative role (C). Learning becomes validated by mastery of the tasks.

In the approach where the teachers become consultants, they guide students based on significant knowledge and expertise. Whatever subject is taught, the aim is to benefit the students by sharing knowledge and expertise freely. The adult educators in the role of consultants ensure that the student has “hired” them before offering their expertise. Then they make sure students perceive a problem, opportunity or unmet need before offering

their expertise. At the same time, they make sure that they, too, understand the problem or unmet need.

Once this has been accomplished, the student remains in charge of the decision-making process, self-directly choosing learning goals and short-term or mid-range tasks. The consultant listens to and acknowledges the student's resistance to change, should that be the case. Together they make sure they have adequate facts or know how to address the task at hand. Finally, consultants leave the responsibility with the student for rejecting or accepting their knowledge. Consultants know their role is more than merely providing subject-matter content. Many times they must provide knowledge and experience in other areas that support the use of the newly acquired knowledge. Consultants analyze situations, consider options and alternatives, make recommendations, and motivate students to action by providing value. Like a doctor who recommends surgery without a thorough analysis of the patient's condition, an adult educator recommending an educational intervention without understanding the student's situation is guilty of malpractice. Successful adult educators in the new paradigm see the importance of the periodically needed role of consultants. They understand that their success depends upon their ability to share their expertise in a responsible manner that contributes first to their students' success.

As learning tasks are more complex in that they require greater knowledge and skills the student brings to the learning situation, the teaching approach exists in a more interdependent context; one wherein the teacher must partner strategically (S) with the student to "get the task done." Teacher content area expertise, more than in previous learning situations, now becomes less important as the process managing of the learning situation is the main expertise needed from the teacher. This strategic partner also becomes an assembler of resources, utilizing the knowledge base of adult education to assess and fulfill the learning needs of the student. This interdependency creates moments of critical self-reflection for the teacher, allowing for growth and learning for the teacher as well. Being in partnership means a commitment to ongoing

communication. Therefore, the possibility of continuous growth and improvement is reinforced for both student and teacher during this approach.

The partnership becomes the basis for constantly looking for new ways to improve the educational experience. Teachers have now moved into the role of being transactional and transformational leaders (TL) in the relationship. This form of educational partnership is the foundation in this paradigm for the education of adults. Partnership evolves when the commitment to the partner is focused on getting mutual needs met. Providing for, servicing, and contributing to the other person's goal achievement is something both partners enjoy doing. Partnership means being committed to something larger than the individual. These educational partnerships have a future beyond a single course or a one-time, educational event. They constitute a mutual commitment to one another as much as to the learning process. The student is asked to take a quantum leap and trust the teacher. While they leap together, the roles of teacher and student become interchangeable. The partnership exists with shared goals, ethics, attitudes, and orientations. There is a common vision that connects teacher and student as both are engaged in transformation.

Conclusion

This scope of roles and practices is a way to review and examine the change processes for our adult education practice. The question mark represents the unknown. As we jointly explore the new frontiers of the adult education industry and seek to meet the needs of today's and tomorrow's adult learner, we should build on our practices and open our practices to acknowledge other knowledge bases. In the increasingly global knowledge society of the 21st Century, we ought to move toward lived interdependence in the learning process.

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