Chapter 8

Framing a Philosophy for 21ˢᵗ Century Global Recurrent Education:
Considerations on the Role of the Adult Educator

Gabriele Strohschen
DePaul University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter delineates the origins of Western values that underlie prevailing adult education practices, calling for a critical analysis of assumptions that undergird our philosophy of adult education. It moves to provide an overview of an alternative, emerging blended shore theory/philosophy of adult education, which guides practitioners in exploring their praxis and creating a credo for it.

INTRODUCTION

In our age of rapidly changing technology, we all too often get drawn into using a latest tool-du-jour or program innovation in our teaching practice without adequate analysis of the needs of learners, or of the appropriateness or usefulness of such a tool or program in the facilitation of the learning process. As practitioners in the dynamic field of adult education, we ought to be at the decision-making table of program design

and delivery models to serve adult learners; and to make appropriate decisions with the utmost professionalism, we ought to have a clear philosophical grounding for our praxis. To be so effective, we must have examined our values and assumptions and built our practice on a thoughtfully constructed credo. Perhaps, most importantly, awareness of deeply embedded assumptions ought to be a precursor for discerning what constitutes a *good* practice. Honoring many traditions of educational philosophy does not preclude the existence of intersections that constitute common ground where disparate stakeholders in adult education

may meet and collaborate toward the construction of a peaceful, sustainable, global society by means of a *blended shore* (Strohschen, 2009) adult education philosophy.

The last century took us from covered wagons on the prairie to rocket ships on the moon. Our world is one in a state of flux and educators are called to address the swiftly changing needs of adults in training, education, and development programs (i.e., adult education). One key lesson we have learned during the last century, when Einstein introduced his theory of relativity in 1905, was that nothing is immune to change. We claim that training, education, and development activities that constitute the field of adult education address the needs of adult learners and aid them in adapting to change. We need to recognize that change has many contexts and meanings. We may refer to change in community contexts or in our respective work environments to which one needs to adapt. In the latter, today's adult learners need to re-engineer skills as career changes occur over their lifetime more so than in the past. In succession training in today's workforce, for example, learning needs emerge and we are tasked with preparing employees, basing this on analyses of educational needs and appropriate design of curricula. We may refer to a new mind-set, sets of skills, or attitudes for living in a globally connected community as being *change*. Gardner, for example, framed his take on such change as "five minds for the future" which are pivotal "if we are to thrive in the world during the eras to come" (2006, p. 1). He highlights knowledge of traditional liberal arts disciplines; the ability to synthesize information and experiences; venturing into creating new questions and solutions; extending respect beyond tolerance of differences; and ethically engaging in good citizenship. In considering changing needs of and demands on adult learners, the adult educator is called upon to ground her practice in a clearly identified credo, because the goals of such adult education activities in a multi-layered context of

change reach beyond skill training, knowledge dissemination, or development of particular mind-sets. The development of a credo begins with critically *reconsidering* our philosophical framework for adult education.

Critical reflection upon assumptions (Brookfield, 1995) alone is a fundamental step in gaining a deeper grasp of self-awareness. Once such awareness has become constituted, engaging self and others in the "eductive" process of teaching (Stanage, 1987), begs for clarity of a succinctly developed credo; our professional platform, if you will. And a credo rests on thoughtfully examined principles, beliefs, values, doctrines, and thinking. Brookfield (1995) also tells us that becoming aware of the implicit assumptions that frame how we think and act is one of the most puzzling intellectual challenges we face in our lives. Brookfield orders assumptions into three kinds: paradigmatic assumptions, which are deeply internalized perspectives of reality we deem objective and may not even recognize as assumptions; prescriptive assumptions, which are rooted in our beliefs and perspectives and lead us to choose our actions or frame our expectations of others and of situations; and causal assumptions, which lead us to determine how things work and how we can change them. Assumptions are so deeply embedded that uncovering them, rigorously examining them, and critically reflecting upon them with the aim of deepening personal and professional growth is not an easy undertaking. Moreover, it is one that is not necessarily encouraged and rewarded, particularly in hierarchal structures that value the status quo, really; or, at minimum, merely prescribe the way toward an already accepted kind of change. Be it at the university, the community organization, or the corporation, a maverick seldom stays long with the pack. The pack typically tries to ostracize her because being critically reflective, even after becoming so, challenges the comfort most of us find in the presumed predictability and orderliness of our adult education world. Yet, it is precisely

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