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Advocacy Partnered with Adult Educational Principles: An Educator's Personal Ethnography

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Andragogy's (adult education principles) role in learner centered environment: an informal look at my journey from youth to a successful faculty instructor in a public school district high school to a graduate student in education and professional presenter / facilitator.

INTRODUCTION

Where to start first, I wasn't really sure but I knew I had to start looking at background information and literature. I started by asking questions: What is advocacy really and what made computer classes so different from other classes or courses of study? Technology is where I learned much of my instructor student interaction. Then I started looking at my own timeline and how I had to work for my own benefits. I had to start asking myself, "Where have I gone when it comes to needing another voice to speak for me or am I out there alone?" Next I began looking for definitions that I could justify and back with the literature and understand how the theme fit. A major question that I didn't foresee was that the manner and demeanor of the instructors of computer technology classes seemed very different from the attitudes and other main stream content rich undergraduate courses from more well established departments or subject areas. These courses were more geared to content dissemination and less about learner centered understanding and application. This is where computer technology classes clearly had a major difference, in that their concern was that the learner needed to really understand

and apply materials and information that they were learning and making it more their own learning and knowledge base to draw from. From their new anchored knowledge, the student learner could apply their understanding to problems and situations that they face in their workplace and create the necessary applications to make a solution or an alternative conclusion as their training and education allows. This more inquiry approach to solving immediate issues is part andragogy (adult education principles) and pedagogy and a very interesting mixture.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND ON ADVOCACY IN MY FAMILY

Actually 31 years ago, the then South Side Journal, a local community newspaper, did an article on my father with a small amount on my mother. It has been framed and posted for many years in my brother's hair salon and is very impressive to look at my dad and brother 31 years ago. I never paid it much attention hanging in that picture frame in the salon, even though as a younger man I had read it many times in the past when it first came out, I had not actually thought much about it since the last time I read it many years ago. But now as I continued to care for my dad in his waning health, I looked up on the wall and began to reread the article again. There was no big surprise except that I was now writing a piece on advocacy and realized that advocacy permeates my whole family. My dad was a dentist and a Boy Scout leader for many decades much later in his life and I believed that the article focused on his advocacy and facilitating role that extends for most of his life and was reflected in the article or so I thought. But that is not what the article was about. As I reread the article more closely and with a better understanding, the article spoke about my father's patriotism and little if any bitterness for being interred in as an enemy national in his own country. As an American citizen my father and his remaining family members were transported by soldiers to a concentration camp in Arkansas during the 1941-1942 timeframe after the bombing of Pearl Harbor since my dad is Japanese American. It was hard for them as a family since they had just buried his father a few months earlier. It didn't matter that he was born here and that he is an American citizen; he and my aunt and grandmother were all placed into the camps. His time there was thankfully

short due in part and in its entirety to a Professor Beale who is identified in the article as one of a team of professors that toured the Japanese American internment camps and literally “rescued”, the students in each of the camps that were medical or dental students. It was through their intervention that these students were allowed to return to a college or university that would accept them and continue their schooling. Much of what occurred in the camps was obscured over time but many of those that lived in these camps were living very different, very demeaning and very harsh lives. So yes my dad was rescued.

In my dad’s case he was able to attend dental school in the Midwest, even though he had to start over. This was only made possible by being advocated for by Professor Beale. Dad did ask for help from his former mission school in Los Angeles, a Maryknoll mission school, and the priest there was able to help him out with some money for tuition. That also explains why my dad never missed donating to Maryknoll’s mission school for many many years afterwards. The point for including this story is that without this intervention and advocacy in my father’s adult education, I would more than likely not be here. My dad after graduation was then drafted into the military, the same military that denied him his liberty years earlier. But because of the advocacy that he experienced and the attitude of gratitude that he exhibited throughout his early life, dad continued to lead an extraordinarily productive life and continues to be an extraordinary human being at 96. (He made his 97th birthday and passed away on April 8 of this year.) It is interesting that the technology of that time (1942-1943) were not yet on the level of personal computers of today. The most that was being used were slide rulers and abacuses. My dad’s inclusion at this point has to do with what is considered the period between 1931-1946 where my dad remembered at 13 years old, cranking up the Model A Ford and driving his father around because my dad, not his father, had the technical grasp of that technology. My dad, Henry Ema, just passed after the completion of this paper but the legacy of his advocacy and his model of service is what has guided me and countless others that he came in contact with. We will miss you Dad.

BEGINNING PERSONAL EDUCATION AS WELL AS TEACHING EXPERIENCE

During my earlier years in school, I attended Catholic School, recalling that my own instruction and learning was geared to the concept of “learning by assignment”, which was learning by pedagogical techniques and sometimes by rote memory. I didn’t identify those techniques as pedagogical until I found out later that is what they were called but did not know what they were called at the time. Much later, as I began teaching and learning through and about adult learning techniques using andragogy but not really identified as andragogy. I later identified that many of the ways that I taught best were ways that I had been following much of the Andragogical methods for much of my own early career. I found that during my early teaching in the late 70 and early 80s, I taught in parochial or religious schools setting usually six out of seven periods a day to a very specific and very different group of students. In a lot of ways I was teaching 6 six different preps each day. Much of the teaching came directly from the content of books because that is the way the curriculum was assembled. There was a very specific sequence that needed to be followed and what made the situation much more intolerable was the lack of professional development and administrative support. Later I taught in a private school teaching chemistry and some physical science classes in that school. I was teaching again five or six classes a day following a book and again following a closely orchestrated curriculum that was tying content to book sequence for simplicity and uniformity. Later in 1985, I began teaching in an Illinois junior/community college for the next 10 years, I taught part time mainly in night school and learned early on that I was teaching in a different venue because I was teaching students in the age range of young adults (17-20s) through 80 years old. Although I did not understand the concept of adult education in a formal sense, what I did understand was that how and what I taught content wise was not as important as the rapport that I established with my students. Much of what I began to understand as adult education was also part of a shared definition with the term advocacy. In many ways the logical step was to link Advocacy with Andragogy since much of the concepts of each tended to overlap.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND HISTORY: A BEGINNING OF TECHNOLOGY AND UNDERSTANDING

I began by recalling my first job with the Boy Scouts at a Boy Scout summer camp when I was 16 and realized that my first teaching assignment was working with other scouts and helping them use preexisting booklets about Boy Scout subject matter. The technology of that time period consisted of very readable pamphlets and brochures. These pamphlets or booklets were self-contained modular courses. Each booklet had reasonable content expectations and specific guidelines. In addition each booklet's content taught and helped the student learn a limited topic area with enough expertise to compile a reasonable model or portfolio. These booklets allowed scouts (students who were members of the organization) to meet the guidelines of the subject being taught. More specifically, the booklets might better be described as a "natural science and other content specific merit badge" modules with very narrowly designed content related to outdoors, nature, environment and camping related topic areas. The way that the merit badge system was set up is to allow personal self-directed and completely self-paced personal study of a particular subject matter for eventual testing or portfolio display as a project. The purpose of this display or presentation is to show that the students (other Boy Scout members) have read the background information in the packet and have satisfied the self-directed self-paced teaching packets. I realized early on that the packets were interesting to motivated individuals and were in themselves self-directed tools for teaching a particular subject area. For that period of time 1960-1973, although other technologies were beginning to emerge, these pamphlets were the state of the art teaching tool and the highest in technologically advanced teaching materials available as personal copies that were the most readily accessible that these scouts (students) could use. Analyzing this Boy Scout packet series further I realized that the course was set up to provide the student, a self-contained, self-paced and self-directed set of course work. Each packet or module was a complete study packet with an evaluation piece attached to it. Once completed the instructor can evaluate the work of the student with the packet and awards the merit badge (pass or fail) and may suggest other activities and additional

content specific merit badge work that the student can pursue to obtain more merit badges. This external motivation, the award of the merit badge, appeared to be a huge motivational factor for the students (Boy Scouts) that allowed them to obtain merit badges and gain more knowledge based on digestible content laden modules. This appeared to me to be even further evidence to advance the concept of andragogy since, in part, these students are motivated to complete their assignment and collect their grades (their merit badges) or credit that builds on past learning and knowledge anchors that helps them to complete additional content based course work. (Knowles)

MY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Later in my own undergraduate education 1974, I needed a course to complete a particular sequence in my education. I had to find one that was compatible to the department's curriculum requirements. I found the course and got approval and then found myself taking a course that was self-directed and self-paced for summer credit at the local community college branch near my home. While taking this class, even though it was not an everyday class meeting, it was my first non-in-residence class, Not to dissimilar to just studying in the library, I was on my own and was given my own summer packet or modules that once completed, provided the credit needed by my program for me to finish and complete the science requirement. It was my first exposure to a hybrid or modified distance learning model. It was a form of independent study that was guided by the packet. Once completed, I would be asked to come in to the college and take an exam to receive credit. I was not required to come to any classes (all materials were self-contained) but was required to finish the packets at my own pace within a reasonable time period. The Andragogical piece (adult education part of self-motivation) is that I had to be motivated to complete the package much as the booklets for Boy Scouts merit badges had to be completed by motivation and self-determination. No one would be pushing us to finish except ourselves and our own motivational force. We would use the educational technology of the time. Again it was not computing technology since personal computing technology was yet immature. It was not a simple

transition for teaching and learning as this was not an area of consistency yet. Few systems were even close in architecture and many operating systems were proprietary. During my class time in 1974-1975 the personal computers were still a buzz and not a reality for real home use yet. So the technology of my time was still the pamphlets or modules. Fortunately these booklets included everything that a person would need or want to know to answer very specific questions or complete a course of study. With the help of my dad I was able to purchase my first Apple II for a whopping 2000.00 and my dad had to cosign for it. I do remember my brother paying over a 100.00 for a Texas Instrument calculator that only did addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. I don't think that it did much of anything else. I know he was really mad at the price a few years down the line. That same 100.00 could buy a whole lot more.

MY EARLY WORK EXPOSURE TO ADVOCACY: LINK TO ADULT EDUCATION

I was an adjunct instructor for the business department/data processing division at the Community College in Southwestern Illinois, 1985-1995, there was a huge difference between types of technology systems in each location that I had class in. My own training was on huge computer mainframes of the time. It was my first exposure and learning experience programming using key punch cards with individual line programming. In my own class work, in order to get our work done for class, we had to literally rush to the computer input device in the basement of the university building that we had class, ran to the punch card machine to get the punch cards, and then load the card readers, and hope that our loaded programs would work correctly the first time. The first one to let it run and create the program product that we needed to turn in the next class day, was definitely a happy person. There was only ONE input device, so yes we literally ran to the basement to get in line to punch in our data and get our cards read. It was a far cry from the personal computer that each district was in the process of getting for their student and night school classes. This was only a few years later as personal computers were becoming more available and affordable. In these classes as the instructor, I needed

to create a learning environment for each place that I was holding class and for each of the students so that it was comfortable for them to learn data processing, programming, and other computer related information. When I started there in 1985 no two sites in any of the extension centers had the same type of computers in any of the labs. It was not readily noticeable but what made each of the locations interesting is that the unrelated systems actually did have a common thread for each of the systems on their campus. That common piece was the fact that all the systems used some form of simple or basic programming language. The educators and administrators made certain that the systems that were put into place for each campus extension center was at least able to use some basic programming language or apple equivalent. What I noticed about each of the student groups/classes in each situation, was that these computer systems though very different, they were able to provide the minimal resources necessary to hold class. As an instructor we had to be able to learn and conform or at least adapt to the systems that we were being exposed and our students needed. The site centers administrators had the ability to lease or buy computer systems or equipment in the extension centers necessary to keep the labs running. Unfortunately many of the centers had systems that were very different from what many of the students, regardless of the type of computer that these students were used to using, had at home. It was important that the students were given the resources that they were going to need to be successful in this class. The interesting part is that the instructor myself, had to advocated for each of the extension centers classes that I taught. I had to create the unique learning environment for each class. Each group or class had to conform to the system that they would be using but with my clever trickery, resourcefulness or my expertise in using different systems, it was easy for me to make the systems work for the students and conform to where their home location. I also tried to make what they learned transportable to their home use. As an educational system this was quite a different system for me to teach in since I was used to teaching middle school through 12 mainly high schools. Junior College taught me a different form of teaching, a different method of instruction in the sense that most if not all of my students in the class were at least 18 years or older. Because of that I later learned that the term that is used in adult education is not pedagogy but andragogy. The

interesting part about andragogy or adult education as it's sometimes referred to, is that the adult learners are usually more motivated to learn and has a purpose and a reason why they are taking a class. Because they have a different set of motivating factors, these particular students have a different reason and a different incentive to keep learning. The learner centered approach works extremely well with these students. And the amazing thing about teaching is that the adult learner can be the epitome of what a goal centered, learner centered students should be. Sometimes it is because the adult learner are so motivated that they are not concerned with issues in the classroom so much as the subject content of the class. They are motivated to know the subject matter and will question the status quo versus in pedagogy sometimes the student will just accept what the instructor says without challenge. This form of blind obedience is sometimes a problem for adult education. The blind obedience that some instructors require in a particular subject, doesn't necessarily lend itself well to the learner and in some circles could be viewed as bullying or some other form of oppression. Many learners require their instructors to be an advocate for them and to be someone that will create the environment for them to learn. Because it was necessary for me to change the environment of the students in my class to meet their needs in a lot of ways I learned what it really had to be an advocate for my students. Many times I had to go to those in charge of the night school and ask for materials supplies and other things that should have been provided to the students through the system and the materials available to for the class. The interesting part about being an advocate for my students really was a more common sense approach. As an adult myself I knew what I would need to have this school provide or what needs to be changed in order to make the environment and the subject matter even more user friendly or learner centered as the current term is being used. But in a lot of cases, the term user friendly can be transformed into learner centered to describe what I would try to do to change the environment in my room for my class.

MY ADVOCACY HISTORY

My own journey as an advocate became clear when I started teaching at a public school in the F F school district and joined the building union. When I was asked to help with the negotiation of benefits and pay, I didn't have to be asked twice. What I learned was not just the training side of negotiation but also the side of understanding andragogy and adult learning theory in a practical application arena. Training came in the form of professional development for leaders and for teacher facilitators; and for the first time I learned what it was like to be valued and listened to. As an adult learner I was motivated because I was going to be thrust into the arena of negotiations with administrators and teachers and I was being put into the center as the leader. I am a fast learner but I also realized very quickly that beyond skills I also needed to establish a level of rapport. Being truthful and honest in my dealings with the administrators and pushing for the needs of the students and educators in my district, the level of rapport needed was important on all levels for the negotiations to be successful. This training by fire taught me the value of rapport in the classroom and taught me the value of listening to my students while trying to meet their educational needs and goals and providing the catalyst for real growth and learning. Tapping into the rapport of the class helped to reach the educational motivation that I needed to get my content across and help the students to really learn day to day, week to week.

My training started early on many, many years ago but my formal advocacy training started with my union and their teacher leaders / facilitators / trainers first showing me assertiveness and the power of language modules and the module of leadership and organization. Slowly many years later I also was trained as a trainer / presenter in social justice and cultural competency. Starting initially in 1999 and going on continuing to the present the training in my union has not ended and will not any time soon. What has happened is a resurgence of the training and the modules that are being offered to union locals in school districts across the country and around the world. There are many locals with members that need to be trained and taught and molded to become advocates to for their own members and students. The training follows adult learning modalities that are taught by educator trainers

who volunteer and they themselves are motivated to pass on their training to other educators. These same trainers in turn have been taught by professional adult educators using the latest training techniques and training research.

ADVOCACY DEFINED AND LINKED TO EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Advocacy by definition is “an act or process of supporting a cause or proposal, or an act of advocating for something” at least according to Merriam-Webster online. Andragogy is “1. The science of understanding (=theory) and supporting (=practice) lifelong and life-wide education of adults. 2. In the tradition of Malcolm Knowles, andragogy is a specific theoretical and practical approach based on a humanistic conception of self-directed and autonomous learners and teachers as facilitators of learning.” The overlap that I perceived was that adult educators were advocates for their students creating the environment that can help them with their understanding and learning and lifelong learning goals. As adult educators, facilitators and coaches, these instructors have a daunting task because it is sometimes difficult to separate their role of advocate from their role of instructor in an adult education setting. Motivation is a key difference between what defines andragogy from pedagogy and probably shapes the concepts that drive individual adult learning versus the training and education of that of a child. Each Adults acts as their own advocate by representing themselves in their own education but seeking the right fit for their own lifelong learning goals.

MY EDUCATIONAL LINK AND ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING

What I learned at that time in those different areas of education was the term advocacy, even though I didn't really understand the term at first. What I did found out, and later discovered, was that as an instructor, facilitator, coach or traditional teacher what I had to do was be more than the content person with the ability to adjust to the needs of my students. I would become the filter or the conduit for learning for the students and I needed to adjust my style and what I presented that

was conducive to learning and the learning environment or community that I was trying to create for my student no matter what age and no matter what subject area.

What I also learned was that through advocacy and establishing rapport with my students, I could really grasp a better understanding of the student's needs. In this way I was able to better communicate the subject matter with your students, audience or participants and then through active listening and more intently focusing on the students, I was able to better understand their needs and their wants. This also allowed me to better discern what advocacy really means and how to best serve these students. It also allowed me to search for what background information do I have that will help me look for the common definitions and meanings and also to look for background data in the literature.

OBSERVATION AND FUTURE STUDIES AND OPINIONS ABOUT THE INCIDENT IN RECENT NEWS

As the issues of many American cities and the unrest that has followed and other incidents that have unfolded in the last few months, I realized that what we have been doing in the classroom in the last few years before I retired and what I have been teaching and advocating to adult learners, instructors and teacher leaders and educators across the country is the same message that I have successfully used in the classroom for almost 35 years. All of the students both in their teens and into their nineties have all been taught the use of the inquiry method and adult learning strategies by myself and my colleagues for at least the last fifteen years. The ideas of student centered and adult learning theory go hand and hand with advocacy since no matter what area we are in and what venue we have been teaching in, all of these learners are converting or need to at least acknowledge that learning is life long and that advocating for our students and their environment is part of our job and not just an adjunct. Mixed with these is the concept of social justice and cultural competence due to the lack of equity in many of our communities. Our communities are the real winners rather than losers if our community can be sustained and allowed to grow and thrive. Ferguson is not a community that is dying but is a community that is necessary to allow continuing on their own course. They

had been a community that came together for their students and fought for their students and education. Many of their students grew up, became educated and came back to the community and helped to make their community a better place to live. Education of the community infrastructure, the administrators and law enforcement, is also necessary and less emphasis on the “old school “ approach to law enforcement and back to the community building activity that has been the attitude of many of the past leaders of that community. They understood their community and their own people and their own unique culture and accepted the aberrant nature of some in the community that chose to be disruptive. They policed their own and in the past created a community. In recent years, that has changed dramatically with less emphasis on the understanding of the community and more assimilation mentality that that is not the way that our society should be acting. May be it is that more recent attitude that needs to be looked at and discarded. Education of the “new administrators” needs to be considered and maybe implemented. The attitude that education is just for “kids and the young adults” should be rethought. Lifelong learning leads to communal understanding and commitment to culture and growth. Listening to your community causes real change and growth to occur. Establishing rapport and community with your work environment makes the environment for growth happen.

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