Explorations in Adult Higher Education

An Occasional Paper Series

Our Work Today

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SUNY Empire State College's occasional paper series brings together the ideas, voices and multiple perspectives of those engaged in thinking about adult higher education today. Our goal is to critically examine our theories and practices, to provoke dialogue, and to imagine new possibilities of teaching and learning.

The ideas expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of SUNY Empire State College or the members of the Explorations in Adult Higher Education *Advisory Board.*

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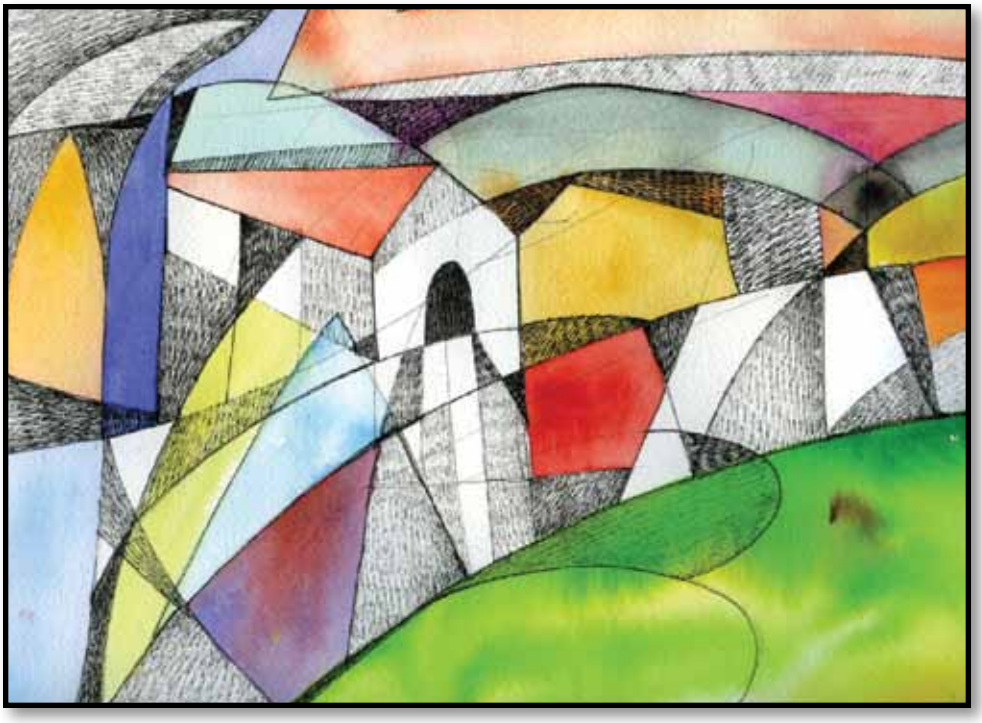

Betty Wilde-Biasiny, *Schemata I*, 2010. Archival pigment print on paper.

Introducing:
Explorations in Adult Higher Education

Alan Mandell, Editor

> *Enlightenment is useless but some of its principles are not – for example, unconventionality.*
>
> Anne Carson, "The Anthropology of Water" (1995)

The education of adults is no longer an aside. Over the last 40 years or so, degree programs for adults have become a significant part of the university landscape around the world. Public and private, secular and denominational, small and large colleges have opened their doors to the so-called "mature student." As adult educators, we can only take great pride in our accomplishment.

The reasons why so many institutions have embraced such former outsiders is complex but, without doubt, the growth of the adult student population into, for example, the majority of American college students today is intimately tied to fiscal realities in which the search for new market segments became a necessity. Adults were right there – in desperate need of credentials and eager to start (or complete) something that they believed was out of reach. Night and weekend classes, online learning, new (often more professionally-oriented) curricula, opportunities for part-time study, and even the recognition of prior experiential learning (RPL, PLA) became the means by which a growing number of institutions sought to welcome adult learners to post-secondary education.

But our accomplishments: significant access for those who had previously been denied entry, the legitimacy of adult education as a rich and academically significant area of study, and the grudging acknowledgment that the university

does not have a monopoly on defining and delivering everything that could or should be learned – all of this work, all of these triumphs, cannot hide the fact that our important successes have been achieved not without traces of palpable limitations.

Sprinkled through the long history of adult education has been a deeply critical spirit, one that has questioned taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching and learning, about the role of schooling in society, about the range of voices that have been given the right to speak, and about the power of educational institutions to control the content, the evaluation, and the very shape of our thinking. Indeed, in announcing the limits of the conventional, adult educators have continued to push us to rethink our core values and to deal straight on with the most basic questions that underlie everything we do: How, when and where do people best learn? How can we pay attention to the ideas, the feelings – to the experiences – of our students? What is the role of the teacher in encouraging and facilitating learning? What do we actually mean by learning? What is a good society and how can we contribute to its creation?

How can we continue to deliberately, imaginatively and unconventionally take on these questions?

The goal of this new SUNY Empire State College occasional paper series is to remind us of this rich legacy, of the issues that have informed its critique, and, especially at a time of significant success when the conventional seems to be going our way, to encourage us not to get rusty but, instead, to grapple with the kinds of questions that have infused the spirit and determination of so much of what so many adult educators have been trying to do for decades and decades. It is, perhaps, as Michael Welton describes in these pages, one small effort to try to "slow us down" in order that we can more carefully reflect on and "challenge" our work. It is to ask, perhaps in new ways, whether, as Mary Alfred wonders, we are, right now, actually in or "out of sync with the realities of a global world." The goal of these "explorations" also is to think about the concrete ways that we can "sustain innovation," given the institutional complexities that Alan Davis, Mitchell Nesler and Lynne Wiley outline in their contribution. It is about how not to lose the momentum urged by Elizabeth Tisdell of "embracing [the] paradox" and searching for the "wisdom" in our collective efforts. This is at the heart of our work today. ❍

Pioneers of the Learning Age

Michael R. Welton

Adult educators in the 1950s had a big dream. They imagined that they could establish a separate discipline based on unique methods for teaching individual adults in various settings and psychological insights into how individuals learn. But they have had to abandon the dream of monopolizing the scientific and humanist understanding of how and where and why adults learn. As it turns out, many disciplines now share this complex enterprise, often unaware of the fact that they are even studying adult learning. Thus, paradoxically, adult education departments in Canada and the United States – if they even still exist – remain small and intellectually confused at this precipitous historical moment when the discourse of the learning society has highlighted how central human learning is to all dimensions of human existence and transformative possibilities. In these brief reflections, I want to offer some comments on this paradox and make some simple observations on what this might mean for those of us still interested in viewing experience and possibility through the learning lens (and teaching students in marginal spaces in universities).

Today, the notion of the "learning society" – and its cognates, the "learning organization," the "learning city" – has made its way into corporate boardrooms and the policy dens of governing elites. We have become increasingly self-conscious that we are some sort of learning society; that a learning organization is a hopeful kind of enterprise, that something good might happen if we think of our cities as learning cities. What is it that our troubled global society is trying to name, to discover, to accomplish? Is the learning age rhetoric just one more desperate gasp at breathing life and hope

into our world of terrorism, financial meltdown, global pandemics, celebrities and mayhem?

Some skeptics and cynics might think so. But I think differently. Humankind's consciousness has advanced to the point where we now recognize the centrality of learning processes and pedagogic procedures in all domains of existence. This acute learning sensibility represents a significant shift in educational discourse in the last 50 years. When adult education was trying to carve out space in the academy, it did so by imagining that it could conceptualize "adult education" as the activity of professionally prepared adult educators. They called it "andragogy" to differentiate this fledgling discipline from pedagogy.

This attempt to draw a circle around a thing called "adult education" fell apart in the late 20th century. It disintegrated because things were moving so fast, things were so fluid and speedy, that our inherited scripts could no longer guide us through the night. We could no longer take for granted that the knowledge and skills of the ancestors would orient us to an ever-changing present. We became conscious of ourselves as persons who were constantly adapting to new learning challenges – in our own bodies, minds and spirits, at work, in civil society's many domains, in cultural expression and play. And, I would suggest, in a world increasingly aware of the pathologies of modernity.

The absence of solidity and permanence stripped us down to a core or elemental understanding that learning was our most precious resource, symbolizing hope that if we can only find the right pedagogical procedures and suitable organizational modalities, we would be able to confront the many problems before us in our ever-shrinking world. We can learn our way out. We are not without hope. It is clear, however, that learning which is lifelong, lifewide and just has many forces aligned against its realization. Powerful people and organizations in our world (in economic, political and cultural systems) skew learning processes and substance in particular directions. Corporate leaders can use the learning organization rhetoric to mobilize learning resources to learn how to dominate marketplaces, and not how to create well-being in their own organizations. The lovely language of empowerment may mask practices that do the opposite. Governments scheme and connive to maintain their power. They choose not to mobilize energy to create the suitable forms

for participatory democracy, even when the technological capacities make new ways of learning citizenship possible. The mainstream media fosters an in-your-face, win at all cost, anti-intellectual "culture of cruelty." It also is evident that our scientific and technological acumen is not matched by our moral and ethical achievements. Our knowledge does not always translate into wisdom. One British filmmaker has even suggested that, when future citizens look back at our time, they will call it The Age of Stupid (Armstrong, 2008).

Thus, the complacent idea that we have been propelled into a shiny, new, bright learning society and that "it's all good" must be challenged. Human learning is not free from the entanglements of interest and power. In fact, one might argue that modern human history has been pulled along by the tug of war between the money code and the life code. At its most elemental, human learning can be in the service of these two modes, and one, the money code, has in our time captured the lion's share of human motivational resources, intelligence and energy. But our learning capacities also can be impelled by compassion and desire to alleviate the suffering of all creatures. The just learning society does not just happen. It must be intentionally designed and enacted.

Learning has broken out everywhere – perhaps exploded. Even the local gardening store has its own newsletter, weaves gardening knowledge into daily conversations, and offers weekend workshops on healing gardens or how to manage your garden from year to year. Doctors, once the sole locus of knowledge about health and disease, now face patients who have read everything about their medical problems on numberless websites. Social movements – such as the women's, cooperative or the environmental – are fundamental learning sites where men and women learn new identities and exercise control over their life situations. Universities do not have a monopoly over knowledge. They are forced to consider their role in the learning society where their monopoly over knowledge is not as secure as it was 30 years ago. Indeed, the presence of Aboriginal and Women's and Environmental Studies in our universities attests to the learning potentials within social movements and civil society.

When early university extension workers traveled down their bumpy and muddy back roads to teach in

some farm community, they were bringing coveted knowledge from the center to the periphery. Many of the farm communities lacked libraries, and farmers lacked instant access to scientific knowledge about farming. Today, we have more access to a wide variety of information. In fact, it may be more accurate to say that we live in an Age of Infotainment, an age of info glut, of the information deluge. It washes over, leaving us reeling and bewildered and disoriented.

The age of information is not exactly "good news for postmodern man." Being deluged by information does not mean we are more knowledgeable and wise. The United States invaded Iraq, and a National Geographic Education Foundation (2006) study revealed that 63 percent of American youth could not locate Iraq on a map! Many theorists of our postmodern time of discontent have pointed out that we live more and more in virtual, simulated worlds that bombard us with endless entertainment and propaganda for commodities. As a result, we are often deeply disconnected from the sources of our lives, and can easily imagine that we are the center of the world, accessible at the tap of a key.

Within the framework of our ambiguous learning society, several questions suggest themselves: How do universities recraft their traditional role of fostering deep critical reflection on the meaning of our time? What does it mean to live and work well? What does it mean to be grounded in a concrete time and place? In a world characterized by incessant entertainment and distraction, what specific tools ought we provide to our students? In a world harnessed to the money code and driven by technical/instrumental rationality, how can universities reimagine themselves as a moral and ethical enterprise? In an academic milieu where "everyone studies learning" and adult educators come in infinite variety, how does one prepare professional adult educators? These questions are salient to those of us with an interest in adult higher education.

We have to be courageous pioneers of the new learning age. Let me highlight some of the challenges we face if we are going to be able to enable our students to acquire the knowledge, skill, sensibility and attitudes to hold their heads high and speak with clear voices in our confusing and anguished world of too much information and too little wisdom.

1. Our world on speed encourages us to surf, skip lightly, bounce distractedly

and lose concentration. Winifred Gallagher, in her recent book, *Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life* (2009), suggests that we may be experiencing a new moral panic: the attention-deficit panic. Professors report that their students are often tired, insanely busy, distracted and unfocused. "Paying attention" – the mind's cognitive currency – is a diminishing resource. I have been tutoring Educational Studies courses at Athabasca University for almost four years. What I notice is that the quick, flippant and breezy style of the social media (the uncapitalized "I" particularly irks me) has seeped into the communication that some, not all, of my students use when they write me.

My students seem rushed, almost breathless sometimes, as they scamper to complete assignments. The ethos of surfing, inability to live with silence and constant battering by aggressive media (social and other) makes it difficult for my students to concentrate, and to really dig into topics. Far too many of my students make assertions without evidence, accept conventional, media-imposed and politically correct narratives, and have little sense of what it means to sustain an argument. Few have acquired the composition skills of respectful dialogue with other writers. Few seem to want to probe deeply into a subject, to read and think widely, to arrive at the "best argument." Even fewer pay attention to the proper citation of sources.

Thus, our task as university educators is not just about making knowledge resources, packaged in lovely self-directed modules, accessible to men and women. We are inducting them into a "community of practice" that contradicts the frenetic worlds of the social and conventional media. University study ought to slow us all down and teach us to concentrate. Students should be nurtured to read widely and slowly, to never settle for any easy answers. We ought to build a "culture of critical discourse," a phrase used by the late maverick sociologist, Alvin Gouldner (1979). The university as a "community of practice" ought to counterpoint the restless, monkey mind that is fermented by our information age. We need to figure out how to encourage our students to focus their minds for extended periods of time. This means switching off other inputs; it means being absorbed in our work of discovery and articulation.

2. In an age of info glut and instant information, we educators must help our students to not only slow down, but also acquire the interpretive frameworks for making sense of the world. They need to learn the skill

of discernment, how to assess the authority of the countless sources present to us. A quick glance at a Wikipedia entry on Locke's philosophy just won't do. Universities can be islands of clear, rigorous, deep thinking in a glossy sea of information and propaganda. But we will have to teach courageously for this to happen. The art of discernment, I believe, is intimately linked to understanding the reasons why we think the way we do and how we justify our actions in the world.

In his recent polemical book, *Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of the Spectacle* (2009), Chris Hedges stated bluntly, "To train someone to manage an account for Goldman Sachs is to educate him or her in a skill. To train them to debate stoic, existential, theological and humanist ways of grappling with reality is to educate them in values and morals. A culture that does not grasp the vital interplay between morality and power, which mistakes management techniques for wisdom, not its speed or ability to consume, condemns itself to death" (p. 103).

Antonio Gramsci (1916), the Italian revolutionary who rotted to death in Mussolini's prison, believed that the educational system ought not "to become incubators of little monsters, aridly trained for a job, with no general ideas, no general culture, no intellectual stimulation, but only an infallible eye and a firm hand." Gramsci and Hedges underscore the fact that learning must be directed by a strong moral and ethical framework. We must know why we are doing what we are doing. We cannot become, as Richard Hoggart said, "blinkered ponies" (as cited in Hedges, 2009).

3. The profound realization that "all of society is a vast school," as Gramsci (1971) once said, enables the small band of adult educators in universities to bear prophetic witness for all citizens to become aware of the nature of learning that is occurring in their workplaces, civil society domains and public spheres. The intellectual breakthroughs accomplished by critical learning theorists have made it possible to see how societies actually work as learning societies. This means, for one thing, that adult education visionaries can enable people who are actually teaching other adults to become aware that they are actually doing so. For another, this means that we must bear testimony to the way learning is structured and organized to either block or open up possibilities for human cognitive, moral, ethical and spiritual development in the interest of

well-being for all creatures. Our task, then, is to play the role of visionary midwife; to make the ambiguous learning society aware of itself as a learning society in the first place, and then to press it beyond its present form toward a just learning society. This, it seems to me, is to reimagine the role of the professional adult educator in the 21st century. ❍

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Betty Wilde-Biasiny, *Schemata IV,* 2010. Archival pigment print on paper.

Adult Higher Education at the Intersection of Globalization, Internationalization and Social Justice

Mary V. Alfred

During the last century, pursuit of education has become an ideal the world over (Suarez-Orozxo, 2007), and higher proportions than ever before are completing post-secondary education (Cohen, Bloom & Malin, 2007). Suarez-Orozxo observes that schools across the world – whether in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe or Oceana – tend to share some basic features: They are designed to prepare students to become engaged citizens, ethical human beings and productive workers who will contribute to the societies in which they live. However, she laments the fact that educational institutions are out of sync with the realities of a global world; they have an obligation to prepare graduates for global citizenship and they most often fail in achieving that goal.

At the start of the 21st century, there is no question that "college graduates will live and work in a world where national borders are permeable; information and ideas flow at lightning speed; and communities and workplaces reflect the growing diversity of cultures, languages, attitudes and values" (Green, 2002, p. 12). These shifts in the demographic landscape of nation states are mirrored on the campuses of colleges and universities worldwide, and globalization and immigration are major forces shaping the demographic transformation of world nations (Green, 2002; Smith, 2007).

While some view this globalization phenomenon with skepticism, others see it as an inescapable worldwide occurrence with tremendous influence on the way we organize our lives. If globalization is such a vibrant force that affects the current order, then there is good reason to assume that institutions of higher education are not insulated from its impact. Indeed, recognizing the interdependence of our global societies, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (1998) called for institutions of higher education to prepare students to understand global issues and their local effects on individuals and communities. One suggestion made for accomplishing this goal is through the process of internationalization.

A Closer Look at Globalization and Internationalization

Globalization is now a central issue confronting higher education, and adult education as a discipline in higher education is impacted by the changes brought about as a result of its myriad effects. One way institutions are responding to the impact of globalization is through the process of internationalization. According to Enders and Fulton (2002), internationalization is influenced by immigration and globalization and represents "deliberate, systematic and integrated attempts by national governments, supranational agencies and higher education institutions themselves to engage in a range of international activities" (p. 1). Knights (1993) specifically describes the internationalization of higher education as the "process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of higher education" (p. 21). Altbach (2002) agrees that internationalization is a major trend in higher education that has global implications and, yet, is widely misunderstood. He explains:

"In broad terms, globalization refers to trends in higher education that have cross-national implications. These include mass higher education; a global marketplace for students, faculty and other higher education personnel, and the global impacts of Internet technologies, among others. Internationalization refers to the specific policies and initiatives of individual academic institutions, systems … . Examples of internationalization include policies relating to recruitment of foreign students, collaboration with academic institutions or systems in other

countries, and the establishment of branch campuses abroad" (2002, p. 29).

While Altbach sees globalization and internationalization as interrelated, Currie, DeAngelis, de Boer, Huisman and Lacotte (2003) disagree, noting a distinct difference between globalization and internationalization. They posit that the use of the term globalization represents neoliberal economic ideology and its material strategies that aim to increase profits and power for transnational corporations and similar strategies that enable government agencies to gain economic advantages and a competitive edge. The authors further argue that the process of globalization promotes "homogenization of cultures and promotion of so called 'world's best practices' where one idea is considered to be the best strategy to progress within the world economy" (p. 9).

Even as Currie et al. call attention to the hegemonic effects of globalization, others argue that higher education must be actively engaged with the global phenomenon (Merriam, Cervero & Courtney, 2006; Qiang, 2003; Ramadas, 1997). Qiang, for example, noted that there are various reasons to bring attention to the increasing requirement for higher education to focus on globalization and the resulting need to internationalize its structure and its pedagogy. He argues that academic and professional requirements for graduates increasingly reflect the demands of the globalization of societies, economies and labor markets; thus, higher education must provide the adequate preparation to meet those demands. Qiang offers other arguments regarding the internationalization of higher education, as well: "The recruitment of foreign students has become a significant factor for institutional income and of national economic interests and the use of new information and communication technologies in the delivery of education has now become a real part of the globalizing process: the cross-border matching of supply and demand" (2003, p. 249). To Qiang, the driver for the internationalization of higher education is capitalism and international trade, rather than the development of global citizenship that Currie et al. (2003), among others, claim to promote.

Whether the internationalization of higher education is viewed from an economic perspective or is seen as the development of global citizenship, Enders and Fulton (2002) observe that it is leading to a process of rethinking the social, cultural and economic roles

of higher education. It is forcing the leadership to reconceptualize education in a broader context in order to respond to the impact of globalization and the need to internationalize higher education.

Moreover, globalization is a contested terrain, having different meanings for different people, with strong supporters and equally strong opponents. As Currie et al. (2003) reported, there have been antiglobalization protests aimed at corporate globalization or neoliberal globalization, that point to the growing inequalities resulting from supposed free trade across borders. Similarly, those supporting globalization argue that free trade will increase world prosperity, and that internationalization of higher education is one avenue through which the democratization of information and the interconnectedness of world cultures can be realized. From this perspective, adult education should be poised to take a more active role in the discourse on globalization and the internationalization of higher education.

Adult Education, Globalization and Internationalization

In *Global Issues and Adult Education: Perspectives from Latin America, South Africa, and the United States,* Merriam, Cervero and Courtney (2006) note, "Globalization is an exceedingly complex issue" (p. 486). It has the potential to build societies while it destroys individuals, groups and communities within nation states.

Despite the negative impact of globalization, Merriam et al. see the potential for adult educators to transform adult education to respond more constructively to the impact of globalization on marginalized populations. They suggest that (a) we create space and listen to diverse voices, (b) adopt a critical stance, (c) attend to policy, (d) develop partnerships, and (e) foster collective learning and action. To these we should add and give priority to the deliberate attempt to include and make visible an international dimension to our programs. It is through the internalization of the curricula and through critical pedagogy that we can begin to attend to the roles and responsibilities that Merriam, Cervero and Courtney have articulated. Similarly, we must clearly define our

goal as we set out to internationalize the field of adult education.

Is it our goal to prepare graduates to meet the demands of global labor markets as Qiang (2002) and others suggest, or is our goal to prepare graduates to respond through critical action to the impact of globalization on marginalized groups and communities as many advocate? I believe that adult education has a responsibility to do both. I see our role as building civil societies while preparing graduates to compete in the global marketplace for their economic well-being. Yet, as described above, at every turn, we also are reminded that education is a contested domain, as the process of global destruction and transformation continues both to empower *and* disempower various stakeholders in adult education.

It is thus critical that we must first start global conversations to explore the range of possibilities available through our collective action. However, Alfred and Guo (2007) and Nesbit (2005) found that adult educators are not actively engaged in research and conversations about the impact on the global phenomena. For example, Nesbit (2005) notes in his review of the *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* (Wilson and Hayes, 2000):

"I was surprised to find few authors refer to or reflect upon the national and international political issues that marked the 1990s. The corporate scandals, the rapid increase in economic globalization, the growing gap between rich and poor, the drift toward various fundamentalisms, continued conflict in the Middle East, including those of Iraq and Afghanistan (and a few others not so apparent), the demise of the Soviet Union, genocide in Rwanda, ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia … are hardly mentioned at all" (p. 74).

Alfred and Guo (2007) found similar neglect from their analyses of the 1995 - 2005 proceedings of the Adult Education Research Conference (AERC) and the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE) conference to determine the level of faculty engagement with international issues. The authors found that only 8 percent of the AERC papers and 7 percent of the CASAE papers published during that period made some mention of globalization, immigration, or addressed other international issues. Overall, the study highlights the near static nature of American and Canadian adult education and the reluctance on the part of adult educators to move beyond the local to more global issues. Without

doubt, moving to a more global agenda in adult education is necessary to our social justice agenda – the hallmark of our discipline.

Call to Adult Educators: Bridging Globalization and Social Justice

Ramdas (1997) reminds us of a well-documented characteristic of globalization. She notes, "For a small segment of the population, globalization means the concentration of wealth and power; for the rest of the human population, it means the globalization of misery and poverty. The numbers of those who fall into the category of 'suffering' are increasing day by day" (p. 36). As a result, Ramdas calls for a transnational, integrated approach to adult education and suggests that in order to make that happen, "we need to reinterpret – and reclaim – globalization" (p. 36).

Unfortunately, with regards to global issues, adult education has remained within a largely instrumentalist, status quo framework as some scholars have found (Alfred & Guo, 2007; Cruikshank, 1996, 2001; Hall, 1997; Nesbit, 2005). Alternatively, adult education, with its philosophy of social justice and equity, can take a more aggressive stance in researching, teaching and speaking out against the negative impacts of globalization, thus contributing to a significant worldwide movement to address the fundamental issues of human rights. In a plenary address at the UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education held in July 1997 in Hamburg, Germany, Ramdas argued:

"In my view, adult education – in its broadest sense – is uniquely positioned to make an empowering intervention on behalf of the underprivileged in every society, and at the same time, influence macro policy. We need to take an imaginative leap, to move beyond the dialectics of the current discourse which continues to propagate a compartmentalized view of education and learning. I believe that our challenge is to reinterpret adult education as a powerful instrument, to build, in the words of Nelson Mandela, 'a new political culture of human rights'" (p. 36).

For adult educators to build this culture of human rights, we must begin to make more purposeful attempts at the internationalization of our research, our curricula and our pedagogy. Adult education, therefore, should answer to the call put forth by Ramdas to build an adult education that goes beyond instrumentalism.

A new agenda for adult education, then, is to re/claim globalization and to engage in research and pedagogical activities that would highlight the benefits and pitfalls of the phenomenon. Engaging in the discourse allows space for the development of a true critical pedagogy that contests the hegemonizing effects of globalization on individuals, groups and societies beyond our national borders. ❍

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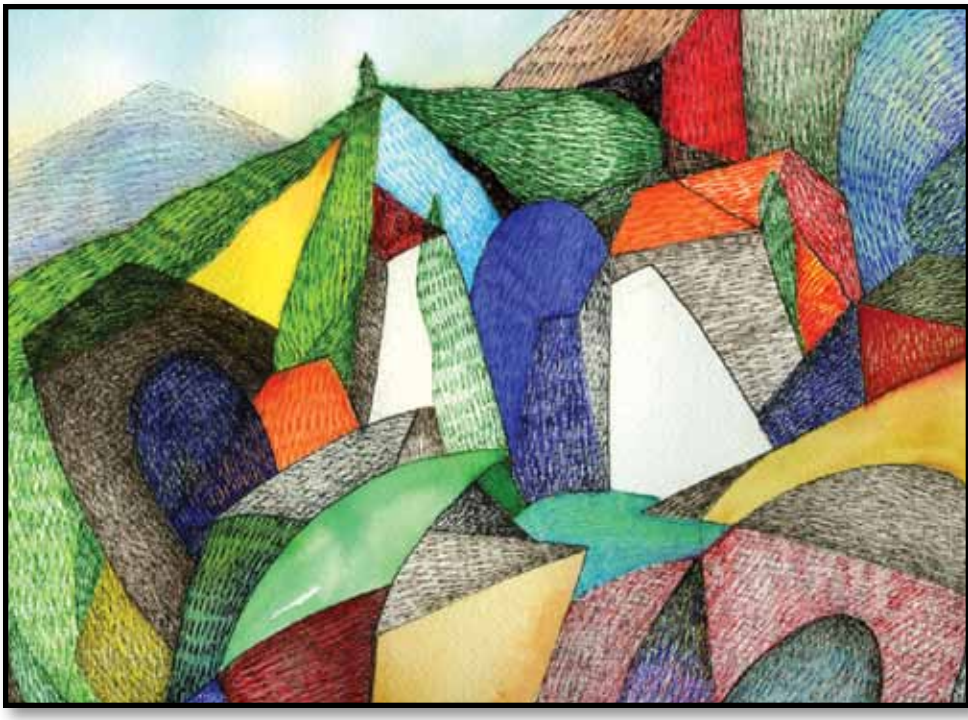
Betty Wilde-Biasiny, *Arcitectonica V,* 2010. Archival pigment print on paper.



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The Role of Strategic Planning in Fostering Innovation in Adult and Open Higher Education

Alan R. Davis, Mitchell S. Nesler, Lynne M. Wiley

As an institution with a mandate and mission that is unique to our sector in New York, and with few comparators around the country, the leadership needs and issues for Empire State College are likewise unusual, with only one known text that is specific to open learning systems such as ours (Paul, 1990). The college is large in some respects: 20,000 learners served annually, both online and onsite at one of more than 35 locations across the state and beyond. In other respects, it is small: the seven regional centers and their satellite units have a good deal of autonomy, as do the three global centers (distance and international learning, graduate programs, and labor studies), all striving to meet local or specific needs.

The full-time faculty complement of about 200 is smaller than for a traditional campus serving so many students, with a more integrated approach across staff sectors to serving learner needs. This unusual staffing structure has its roots in the individualized approach to mentoring and learning that the college developed in its early years, and which still informs much of its discourse internally. It also is reflected in the core values and organizational culture of the college. The autonomy of the mentor-learner relationship also is evident in the relative autonomy of each mentor, and of each center.

About half of the 2,000 employees at the college are adjunct instructors, many of whom are widely dispersed; this adds to the issues of fragmentation and disconnectedness among the academic centers.

The Context for Strategic Planning

Ongoing tensions between the original regional centers and units (with their focus on individualized face-to-face studies, study groups and residencies), and the faster growing, predominantly online instruction (through distance learning and in the college's School for Graduate Studies), have created a complex environment for strategic planning. Some felt that the core values and the identity of the college were being threatened by the rapid expansion of online studies (and the associated allocation of resources), while others were concerned that the inability of the college to change and adopt various technologies and scalable approaches in order to prosper and grow not only would undermine our mission (to reach and serve all students), but also our viability as a college in the face of reduced state support and increased competition from other public and for-profit institutions.

Empire State College's founding president was in place for almost three decades, and after the initial and highly creative early years of the college, it entered a period of incremental growth and diversification; distance learning and graduate studies were added despite considerable controversy (Bonnabeau, 1996). In 2000, the second president arrived and recognized the need for systems to better track student progress and to systematize what had been a fairly loose set of practices that had evolved from the original individualized model. He also engaged in a comprehensive approach to rebuild or renovate the college's facilities both at its coordinating center and in the regions.

The two eras and the approaches of the first two college leaders reflect nicely the dichotomy between the incremental versus the management science approaches to running an institution (Keller, 1983). Both have enormous power, but also some shortcomings; a new blend of approaches that focused on the strategic plan seemed to evolve naturally for the new president who came to Empire State College in 2008.

The third president arrived to a sense of exhaustion among many who were responding to the amount and rate of recent change, but also to much optimism that, working openly and collaboratively, the college could find a new way to stay rooted in, but not be limited by, its past. In particular, many seemed to feel that the existing 2006-2010 strategic plan had been developed without significant consultation, and

though reasonable in many ways, did not have a wide sense of ownership. It was not used in budgeting and decision making, there were no related and nested plans (e.g., no marketing, technology and academic plan), and tracking progress toward its execution was seen as a chore, and, indeed, was in danger of being ignored altogether. Likewise, there was no place within the college to provide expertise, and take ownership for, the processes and mechanics of planning. In other words, the college was still in a period of transition from its "golden years" as the crucible of exciting and brave new approaches to higher education, to one that was able to stay innovative and to respond to changing demographics, learner needs and the affordances of new technologies – all in a scalable and affordable way.

This situation was exacerbated to some extent by weak leadership from the state university level, which had its focus on "memoranda of understanding," whereby enrollment and other targets were to be met. This was the "performance plan" for presidents, and no broader, modern approach to strategic planning was given much credit. Given this, and the strangeness of the college to most SUNY and state bureaucrats, this college's presidents were left somewhat to their own devices.

Although the financial crises of 2008 (and beyond) led to a number of cuts in state funding, because the college was more tuition-dependent than most it was in a better position to determine its own destiny. New York state and the State University of New York over-regulation was in some ways more problematic: there was little incentive for the college to grow and expand its mandate. In fact, for the 11 years from 1998 to 2009, the college had lost over $25 million to the state university system as a "penalty" for being too efficient, and thus not needing as many resources as traditional campuses. This situation is expected to change as a result of the arrival of the new chancellor in June of 2009, who undertook an extensive process of planning for SUNY that occurred in parallel with our process, and raised the importance of such planning for the system and for its 64 campuses, including a complete rethinking of the budget allocation model.

Overview of the Strategic Planning Process

The complete strategic planning process for Empire State College was split into two roughly equal periods.

The first was to develop a vision for the college for 2015, and to do this in a highly consultative manner with no assumptions except for the common desire to see the college prosper for the benefit of its learners.

The seven months of deep inquiry that preceded the development of the college's *Vision 2015* provided an important opportunity for the new president to directly engage with all sectors of this highly distributed college. It also revealed a number of serious infrastructural issues that needed immediate attention, and others that would need longer and deeper engagement. Technology systems were awkward and there was no plan in place for improvement. No new programs were in development, and ideas for new areas of overall improvement were stifled. Budgeting and assignment of workload were divorced from the strategic plan, and did not reflect the best interests of almost anyone (learners, faculty and staff, deans). Educational planning, a core activity of the mentoring-learning model, was evolving in ways that were not widely understood nor shared. Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, the fragmentation of the college was manifest in the lack of sharing and networking across the institution regarding issues, best practices and innovation, leading to inconsistencies among learners' experience that were not justified by the individualized approach. There was no incentive or direction to share in this way, and the technology did not support easy networking. It was clear that, although there was wide interest in seeing the college act and present itself as "one college," we behaved as many smaller colleges, sometime for good reason, but more often not.

It was thus clear that a major theme of the new strategic plan must be to address the perceived and actual fragmentation within the college, to provide ways for best practices to be shared, issues to be discussed, and innovation to be supported – in other words, to become, rather than "one college," a networked, learning organization in every sense.

Since the first period of developing a shared vision for the college revealed a number of such challenges facing the institution, it was essential that the second period focus on strategies to address them. A small team, consisting of the president and two other senior administrators from the college, worked to categorize and classify these challenges. This proved to be very difficult, largely because the challenges identified often overlapped

and many issues occurred at different levels at the institution. Through a series of meetings, which devolved largely into brainstorming sessions, themes ultimately emerged, providing a framework for classification of the institutional challenges. And as this was an iterative process with feedback from multiple constituencies, the themes evolved and became more refined over a six month process.

The 2010-2015 Strategic Plan: Vision 2015 and Strategic Plan for 2010-2015

The three overarching themes that were used to organize the strategic plan were:

- the college as an innovative, learning organization
- sustaining and managing growth
- telling our story

The first theme addresses issues of reflection, effectiveness and innovation. Institutional intelligence gathering about processes, procedures, student learning and all measures of effectiveness are addressed within this theme. Key goals include improving student retention and satisfaction, enhancing productivity, providing clear communications, and sharing knowledge and making connections between people so that each center does not have to recreate the wheel.

The second theme addresses the trends of growth in both students and all levels of employees at the college. Part of the sense of exhaustion evident when the third president arrived was not just from the pace of change, but also the pace of growth, and the sense that an underresourced faculty, staff and administration could not be stretched any further to accommodate all of the adult learners who sought an education from the college. "Sustaining and managing growth" includes goals that address faculty and staff climate issues (ensuring that work life indicators demonstrate improvement), growth in both the student body and the types of services and offerings they receive, and developing sustainable models for space, budgeting and deployment of human resources.

The third theme addresses issues of reputation, recognition and funding. Strategic communications, external relations and generating new sources of revenue are the goals associated with this theme.

Each of the three themes has specific key goals associated with it. The key goals are designed to be measurable and allow for the tracking of the

success of the overall plan (Dooris, Kelley & Trainer, 2004; Taylor & Massy, 1996). Action plans are developed at the level of individual budget managers (deans, vice presidents, directors, etc.) to address the goals and strategies. The newly established Center for Planning and Institutional Effectiveness is charged with overall coordination of the strategic plan and the measurement of the institution's progress toward achieving its goals. To accomplish this, a collegewide report card (or dash board indicators) is under development, reflecting institutional key performance indicators. The KPIs relate directly to the eight goals outlined in the strategic plan. However, each division is charged with tracking its own KPIs and performance indicators, which reflect divisional effectiveness but may not rise to the level of a *key* performance indicator.

Reflections on the Process

The best institutional planning models tie goals to resource allocation decisions on an annual basis, with a view toward transforming institutions over time. When done well, strategic planning is a process that is capable of responding to unexpected events and unintended consequences. As ideas are implemented, budget and planning priorities evolve; some programs and activities become less consequential, while others become more complex and challenging. In essence, planning benefits from re-examination and redefinition.

Selznick's concept of organizational character bears directly on this process. Selznick (1957) views organizational character as a four-fold entity composed of historical precedents, social integration, functional adaptations to the internal and external environment, and dynamic responses to new opportunities, needs and problems. Institutional character develops over time into "distinctive competence" – the informal commitments or values that guide organizations in making decisions. Strategic planning provides academic institutions with the opportunity to engage in self-definition and self-reconstruction on a regular basis, something that they might not typically do unless prompted.

This kind of redefinition is the key to sustaining innovation in adult higher education, where changes in the external environment are rapid, and the opportunity to respond to changing contexts and social configurations present themselves regularly. Doing so in light of the outlooks, habits and commitments that give institutions

their distinctive character allows them to maintain their identity while remaining responsive to changing conditions.

Empire State College's strategic plan addresses the aspirations of the college community and develops a vision of the platform that the college will occupy in mid-decade and beyond. The key question driving the strategic plan, as identified collectively by the community, was: "What must Empire State College accomplish by 2015 in order to enhance and differentiate its position among the nations' leaders in adult learning, and provide high-quality and affordable interdisciplinary and professional education to motivated learners in New York state and beyond?" *Vision 2015* articulates goals that are mission related, connected to ongoing and projected needs, and capable of being achieved by 2015.

In order to ensure that the plan is used to guide decision making, planning is now tied directly to budgeting, and the vice president of the Center for Planning and Institutional Effectiveness oversees implementation. Achieving the objectives listed in *Vision 2015* is a continuing priority. Annually, members of the senior staff are asked to reflect on what they have accomplished in meeting the goals identified in the plan: projects they have begun in an effort to meet key goals; what they have learned from these initiatives that suggest new directions for funding; what changes, if any, they need to make to projects that are currently underway; new initiatives that they wish to begin; and what they must accomplish during the remainder of the plan in order to fulfill the goals associated with their areas of responsibility.

These priorities connect the long and short-term planning of the college with the budgeting process. Indeed, the budget is the tangible link between our operations and our strategic plan. A typical planning process includes not only situational analyses, forecasts and detailed recommendations, but focused implementation strategies. The information we obtain annually relative to departmental, divisional and institutional priorities is systematically fed back into planning and into the development of key performance indicators. Issues and opportunities for innovation rise to the top of the agenda depending on external circumstances and internal priorities. The process allows us to look back and determine what became important to us during the previous year, and assess whether recommendations that were not addressed have changed in priority.

Assigning presidential and divisional importance to specific goals and objectives, and providing resources to fund them, allows the college to quickly and effectively devote resources to priority areas within the institution.

The college's mission statement, commitments and core values, exemplified in the goals described in the strategic plan, guide faculty and staff in making budgetary decisions. George (2003) has observed that "the best path to long-term growth … comes from having a well-articulated mission that inspires employee commitment" (p. 62). Strategic planning provides adult higher education institutions with the kind of focus that allows employees and stakeholders to question accepted ways of doing business while remaining tied to a highly-developed vision. George's focus on the human element of planning, and the need for organizations to find ways to tap into people's hearts, reminds us that institutions "that link the passions of their employees to the generation of innovative ideas will have the capacity to sustain their growth for decades" (p. 134). The best strategic planning processes are designed to accomplish just this goal.

Ultimately, our planning process has taken us back to some basic questions: What is the purpose of adult learning in the 21st century, and what is distinctive about the way the college provides it? What must Empire State College accomplish by 2015 in order to enhance and differentiate its position among the nation's rapidly growing adult learning community? We need to remain responsive to trends in scholarship, new forms of service delivery, and to the changing needs of our students. In the end, we aim to provide a learning environment that: supports learners as active partners in their education; transcends the boundaries of time, place and ways of learning; integrates and engages learners with their past, present, and future creative and intellectual lives; creates initiatives to foster respect, civility and a welcoming environment; and supports the social, cultural, and economic development and sustainability of its learners and their communities.

We are convinced that learning occurs when connections are made between adult learners and faculty mentors. Our strategic planning process, and its accompanying reassessment of the life of the college, has allowed us to reaffirm our strengths while providing a platform for exploration and discovery. ❍

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Betty Wilde-Biasiny, *Arcitectonica III,* 2010. Archival pigment print on paper.

Working Toward Wisdom in Adult Education in Changing Times

Elizabeth J. Tisdell

I have worked in the field of adult education for a long time. This year marked my 20th anniversary of attendance at the annual Adult Education Research Conference and my formal involvement with the field, to say nothing of my informal involvement for 10 years prior to that. Over the years, I have seen a lot of changes – the development of new programs, as well as the closing of some longstanding graduate degree offerings at universities. There have been joys and struggles, debate and collaboration, frustration and hope. As we move forward in our field, what I would like most for myself and for other adult educators is that we practice our profession by drawing on our collective wisdom and its paradoxes. As educational writer Parker Palmer (1980) suggested some 30 years ago, we don't think our way into a new kind of living; rather, we live our way into a new kind of thinking. I'm hoping we can do so with wisdom.

Major Discussions and Concerns in the Field

Major journals in the field, the handbooks of adult education that come out every new decade, and the *New Directions in Adult and Continuing Education* sourcebook series give us important data about current issues in the field. In recent years, there has been much discussion on different theoretical perspectives on adult education, such as on how positionality or one's social location affects teaching and learning from a blend of socio-cultural, feminist, race-centered, postmodern, and critical theory perspectives. This has resulted in numerous journal publications as well as the brand new *The Handbook of Race and Adult Education* (edited by Sheared, Johnson-

Bailey, Colin, Peterson & Brookfield, 2010), which gives an in-depth look at issues of race and ethnicity in our field. There also has been much discussion on transformative learning and what it means theoretically and practically, also to result in a new handbook (edited by Taylor & Cranton, forthcoming). These particular handbooks on specific aspects of adult education tell us that these have been important issues in recent years. They stand with the newly released more general *Handbook of Adult Education* (Kasworm, Rose & Ross-Gordon, 2010), that focuses on the centrality of adult learners in the many contexts of adult and continuing education and what it means for our future in the era of the Internet and globalization in multiple community contexts. Further, the increased publication in the past 10 years on the role of various dimensional factors of being such as emotions, spirituality, the arts, popular culture, and the body in adult learning and development give new insight about how to teach and learn more holistically.

While various publications tell us in print what is current, it is more often at conferences where people gather, that one understands more about the *tenor* of the field, the emotions, the passions and hopes, as well as the struggles and fears people have about it. The passion in people's eyes, the excitement and enthusiasm in their voices when talking about their research or practice speaks way more about what generates life for them than can ever come alive in the two dimensional world of the printed page. People's fears and concerns also become apparent, sometimes coming out in angry outbursts, or in rolling eyes in the public venue of opening or closing sessions, or in the whispers to the colleagues they may be sitting beside. But this feeling dimension often comes out in less formal venues in conference places – in dinners at restaurants, in hotel room suites, in intimate conversations among close colleagues who also are friends. It is in these places that one learns not only some of the intellectual issues for people, but the emotions attached to those issues, and the fact that most of the world's work happens through relationships that include but transcend professional networks.

In my own experience in these formal and informal gatherings at conferences, it is clear that there are many positive things happening in the field. But there are some areas of concern that I have seen and heard articulated as well, that I would like to address here. I believe these are reflective of issues in the larger culture, namely:

a) There is some sense that adult education as a field is in crisis, probably related to the difficult economic realities of our time;

b) Scholars and academics tend to be bigger on critique of positions, and a bit shorter on solution and inspiration for dealing with problems;

c) There tends to be more of an emphasis on the articulation of difference and division than on integration of unity or holism.

I would like to suggest that the literature on wisdom might offer insight on how we might deal with some of these issues in positive and productive ways that lead to creativity and inspiration, rather than fear and suspicion.

Wisdom and Its Paradoxes

What *is* wisdom, and what might it suggest for adult education scholars and practitioners? To be sure, the quest for wisdom to deal with some of the greatest life questions of who we are, why we are here, and what gives life meaning has been with us since the dawn of time. It has been the subject of many of the world's great religions and in indigenous cultures (Smith, 1994). There also are references to wisdom in the professional literature that often focuses on how practitioners apply knowledge in an artful way in professional practice settings such as in medicine, business management, social work or education.

Most of the literature exploring wisdom in the religious traditions refers to the Proverbs 24 reference from the Hebrew Bible, where Wisdom is building *her* house, and carving seven pillars. Wisdom has also been the subject of philosophy; indeed, the very root of the word "philosophy" means "love of wisdom." Often cited in such discussions is an Aristotelian distinction between *Sophia,* as the highest form of wisdom (in the transcendental sense, and similar to the notion of wisdom in the Hebrew Bible), *phronesis,* which is practical wisdom, and *episteme,* which is theoretical wisdom (Osbeck & Robinson, 2005). Many authors also recount the story of Socrates, seen by his contemporaries as having knowledge and wisdom but who is rumored to have denied being knowledgeable or wise. Hence, humility is deemed a characteristic of wisdom, as the recognition that all knowledge is partial. This tension of wisdom as having knowledge but recognizing that at the same time, one does not have knowledge, connects wisdom (in the sense of Sophia) to the notion of paradox. Goldberg (2005)

discusses the "paradox of wisdom" (the paradox being that the aging or "old" brain becomes more wise) from a neuroscience perspective, arguing that adults who age well tend to make decisions based more on pattern recognition as a result of the complex neural patterns that develop over time. These complex neural patterns allow for drawing on multiple parts of the brain at the same time, which results in a wiser way of being in the world. In essence, Goldberg tries to look at wisdom from a scientific perspective in making sense of it. Other authors, such as Parker Palmer (2004) tend to look at wisdom in a more holistic way, as that which is integrational; he encourages people to pay attention to the hidden wholeness within. Many authors also discuss the cultivation of wisdom, either in the *phronesis* sense of practical wisdom or in the *Sophia* sense of the metaphysical. But across all of these discussions, there appears to be an integration quality to wisdom that allows people to negotiate tensions and opposites in a creative way that leads to more integrative thinking and being, and an ability to deal with paradox: the tension of opposites.

To some extent, this once again takes us back to the world's religious wisdom traditions, because many of those traditions also deal with the notion of paradox – metaphors of life arising from death and destruction, or that to lose oneself is to find oneself. There is the sense that dealing and living the tensions of opposites, and embracing that tension, pulls us open to something new, and to our very creativity. But in dealing with these tensions of opposites in our field, we also need to be able to apply some of the metaphysical principles of the wisdom of *Sophia,* to the practical realities or the *phronesis* of our field. And it is clearly desirable if we do so with the humility of Socrates!

Embracing Paradox in Forging the Field of Adult Education

What might this discussion of wisdom suggest for dealing with the concerns I highlighted above, namely: the sense of being in crisis as a field; the perhaps over-emphasis on critique; and the tendency to focus more on what separates or divides than on what unifies and integrates? I would suggest that part of the answer lies in the notion of paradox itself: that we need to embrace the tension of the opposite, and to engage the dialectic to be pulled open to our greater creativity.

First, I am not sure that the field of adult education is in crisis – this

feeling that I pick up from others at conferences might not be entirely accurate. But there are certainly concerns about the closing of some graduate degree programs in adult education in the English speaking world, and there are concerns about funding, spanning from enrollment issues to finding grants, and to the fact that many faculty who retire or leave an institution are not being replaced. But if the old adage that a crisis is both a danger and an opportunity is true, it might behoove us to think about "opportunities" before us that these times of scarcity of resources might present. Some adult education faculty members are being absorbed into other programs when departments close. Typically in these new departments, there is less knowledge about the teaching/learning needs of adult students. While one can indeed be marginalized in such places, there also are great opportunities for collaboration with new colleagues from an adult learning perspective. In addition, the more we collaborate with others in professional fields such as medicine, health care or business, which are disciplines where there is more emphasis on curricular content than on pedagogy, the more we have the opportunity to really influence the education of adults in multiple disciplines and settings. There also is typically more grant funding available in such content-driven fields, and collaborating with colleagues can lead to further creative thinking.

Secondly, the fact that we are a field that encourages critique of positions is indeed one of our strengths. Of course, it is important to rationally consider the strengths and weaknesses of a particular position, and make apparent its theoretical underpinnings or assumptions, and to help adult learners (and ourselves) to ask critical and analytical questions. Nevertheless, too often the notion of critique as it is practiced, is tearing apart a particular position and criticizing it, with an emphasis only on what is wrong with it and no consideration of what is right with it. There is generally a strict emphasis on rationality in such considerations. While I applaud sharp and focused critical thinking grounded in rationality, which requires analytic thinking about the parts, it is not rationality alone that will ever inspire people to change or to create something new, as the research on transformative learning tells us. Rather, change is borne of experience of the *whole* that is multidimensional, including that which provides some inspiration that activates a sense of hope and possibility. This doesn't

come only from rational critique as in negatively criticizing a position. It also comes from using a different part of our brain to express what is good, hopeful, or new, such as the way art, music, dance, or poetic expression does. Thus, I believe we also need to focus on what is good about a position as well as what is weak about it, and also to provide examples of inspiration in the very positions we critique. This can happen not only through logical academic presentation, but also through creative expression or representation. This is part of living the dialectic. This doesn't mean giving up rational critique. It is simply part of embracing the tension of opposites.

The third concern, that we tend to focus more on what separates and divides than what integrates and unites, is probably borne of the other two: particularly the emphasis on rational critique which requires separating out positions into parts or categories. We often focus on what separates us from other related fields (such as human resource development), or what separates us into groups of people by culture, gender, race or sexual orientation. It is extremely important to examine the differences in underlying theoretical perspectives among different and related disciplines, and to do research on the needs of specific groups of learners of different gender, race, culture and sexual orientation groups. Indeed, we are not simply generic people with exactly the same learning needs. (I have been a contributor to the research and discussion on the importance of attending to diversity and inclusion.) Nevertheless, there tends to be a lack of consideration of what also is common among us, across disciplines, across gender, race and class groups. There is unity within our diversity. While we do need to attend to the diversity, it also is important to search for and embrace the unity and the community. After all, E-pluribus Unum – or "In the many, One." There is a hidden wholeness within.

Conclusion

I have great hopes for the field of adult education as we forge together our future, and embrace both/and thinking and being, as we try to live on both sides of the dialectic, and we experience the tensions of living in-between, as some of the wisdom literature suggests. Indeed, perhaps it is by living those tensions that we will be pulled open, and to discover not only new academic positions, but mystery, passion and wonder in the process. To be sure, it is not only a process of thinking; it is also a process of living that involves

tapping into multiple ways of knowing and being, and discovering the hidden wholeness within. Let's hope that our collective attempts to do so will lead to our greater wisdom. ❍

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