

Uncovering Emotion in Adult Learning

Michelle Kathleen Mulvihill
B.A., Grad Dip Couns., M.A., M. Ed.

Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Education

University of Technology Sydney

PO Box 123
Broadway NSW 2077
Australia

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Declaration

Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree, nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle K. Mulvihill", is written over a horizontal line.

Michelle K. Mulvihill

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Uncovering Emotion in Adult Learning

Abstract

The presence of emotion and feelings in adult learning is obvious and undeniable. Does emotion have an integral place or is it incidental or an obstacle?

This research looks at what might be learned about emotion when an adult learning facilitator uses sustained reflection on practices that use various ways of knowing to more deeply engage adult learners and practitioners with emotionality.

The inquiry looks at the question: If story is used to present, illuminate and reflect on adult learning experiences, where emotion is welcomed and honoured during the learning process, what can be revealed? The primary research question is: What can I come to know about the inner and outer processes of adult learning, by reflecting on moments in facilitated learning in which emotion is uncovered in the stories of participants and in the story of the adult practitioner?

Organic inquiry was chosen as a research methodology for this research because of its capacity to focus on stories as vehicles whereby both conscious and unconscious realms can be accessed. Arts-based research methodology was also used for this inquiry because it provided the dramatic setting, through the creation of semi-fictionalised stories, by which emotionality could be uncovered. These artistic forms of expression, used to reflect and examine the learning practices, extend the boundaries of how we come to know emotionality in adult learning.

Four adult learning scenarios are presented in the textual art forms of drama, film, storytelling and a circus presentation. The researcher's reflection on each of these vignettes provides one of the filters through which the emotionality of the learning scenarios is further experienced and understood. Reflections from some of the participants who were involved in each scenario are also presented, so as to deepen the reflection. In keeping

with the methodology of organic inquiry, the reader is invited to engage with this research as co-researcher.

This thesis presents an alternative way of understanding emotion in adult learning, one that reflects the central role of emotion in our ways of knowing, particularly in non-formal learning. The thesis argues that personally significant and meaningful learning is fundamentally grounded in, and derives from, the adult's emotional connection with the self and the broader social world.

The nub of this inquiry is to explore further what learning might happen, in different adult learning settings, when emotionality is uncovered, revealed and made known. A selection of postures, or behaviour and attitudes, are named which adult educators may wish to reflect on or adopt, in an effort to uncover emotionality in their own practice.

The thesis concludes that emotions and feelings can play an integral role in adult learning experiences.