

Uncovering Emotion in Adult Learning

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June, 2007

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

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Michelle K. Mulvihill

November 2006

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge those people who provided me with assistance throughout the process of dreaming, reflecting and writing this thesis.

In particular, I would like to thank Professor David Boud, whose academic supervision engaged me in an extremely challenging and helpful process of reflection, as together we teased out the many different aspects of this inquiry. I also acknowledge the work of Dr Alex Nelson, who was part of my supervisory panel and who acted as individual mentor, academic accompanist and inspirer of my imagination.

I am grateful to the co-researchers, co-participants in the inquiry, who took part in responding to my invitation to reflect with me on the learning experiences we were part of together. Their candid and generous responses are gratefully noted.

Time spent with John Heron at the South Pacific Centre for Human Inquiry in Auckland, New Zealand, was affirming, validating and enlightening.

My best friend, Elizabeth Hume, constantly persuaded me to never give up. Her support and enduring encouragement of me during these years is gratefully noted. I also acknowledge her careful proofreading of the text.

My thanks to Maxine and Emma for their continued interest and constructive support, in different ways, throughout this process. I thank them especially for their reading of the final draft and their ongoing engagement with me throughout the process, which assisted me to bring this thesis to completion. The ongoing interest and reassurance of my family in reaching this goal is also acknowledged.

Grateful thanks to Pat Skinner for her expert assistance with proofreading and document formatting. Gemma and the printing team provided word-processing and printing help, at the very end.

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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.