

# TOWARD A THEORY AND PRACTICE FOR WHOLE-PERSON LEARNING: RECONCEPTUALIZING EXPERIENCE AND THE ROLE OF AFFECT

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*Although the importance of affect is acknowledged in the North American literature on adult learning and adult education, its role remains undertheorized. We argue that the influence of American pragmatism contributes to a cultural bias favoring reflective discourse and, thus, theoretical inattention to the role of affect. We describe a theory of personhood developed by John Heron to explore how his phenomenological lens on experience provides a more serviceable framework in which to understand the affective dimension of learning. Taking a phenomenological perspective suggests how adult learning strategies can be linked to a group habit of being that we call learning-within-relationship. Posited on what we describe as the paradox of diversity, we argue that there is a direct relationship between the degree of diversity among learners and the need to create whole-person learning strategies that fully engage learners affectively.*

**The purpose of this article** is to stimulate a dialogue among North American adult educators about their assumptions regarding what it means to learn from experience. Our premise is that most adult educators in North America are grounded in a theory of experience that is influenced by John Dewey and American pragmatism. Our contention is that a theory of experience grounded in radical phenomenology provides an alternative perspective that has important educational implications. We believe that a serious dialogue about the difference between a pragmatic and a

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phenomenological understanding of experience goes to the heart of the ongoing discourse in adult education about the need for a more wholistic theory of learning (Taylor, 1998). In this article we present a summary of what we believe to be the core differences between these two understandings of experience, then examine the relevance of these differences for theorizing the role of affect in learning. Part of our purpose in this article is to introduce into the North American discourse the theoretical work of John Heron (1992, 1996) whose ideas, we believe, illustrate in a compelling way that when experience is conceptualized from a phenomenological perspective, the foundational role of affect becomes clear. We use the concept of *learning-within-relationship* to describe the importance of such theorizing for practice, especially for learning events where groups of learners bring highly diverse (and potentially divisive) lived experience to the learning setting.

To situate the ensuing discussion, we begin this article with an illustrative story to provide an experience for readers. At the conclusion of the analysis, we will return to the story, showing how it illustrates the difference between pragmatic and phenomenological perspectives on experience.

### ELIZABETH'S STORY ABOUT LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

I tell a story about my own profound learning about White consciousness. Several years ago, in my role as faculty advisor to a cohort of mature adult students, I participated in a synergic inquiry about race and racial identity. Our cohort chose the synergic inquiry process (Tang, 1997; Elias, 2000) because it provides systematic procedures for helping people learn from experience about themselves and others. The initial procedures are called simply, "self knowing" and "other knowing."

Our cohort included two racial groups, so we divided into two teams—the Black team, with 6 African American students, and the White team, with 12 students and myself. For the first 3 months, the teams met separately with the goal of engaging self- and other-knowing within each team. The hoped-for outcome for these first 3 months was that each team could find commonalities among its members, thus enabling them to create team self-knowing about racial consciousness. Both teams held extensive meetings outside of class.

In our White team, we received appreciatively each person's individual identity story. From reflection about the stories, we developed themes of white identity, such as rugged individualism, tension between group and individual needs, isolation, loneliness, and conformity. We agreed that our over-arching theme was "the constructed dualism of self and other," which we recognized "sets up the conditions for 'isms' to exist" (Barlas, 1997, p. 22). When we tried to translate our agreed-upon themes into a plan for presenting our White-team self-knowing to the Black team, we discovered that our individual perspectives were too divergent for agreement. We finally agreed to use some props that could represent our themes visually and that each person would be spontaneous in working with these props at our

presentation. The props would be white cardboard cut-outs of body parts and rolls of white crepe paper streamers.

Because I hope the reader will share my felt encounter with our White team's presentation, I shift my narrative to the present tense, telling the story as if I were now living it.

The Black team asked to be first. They stand in front of a mural they have painted with bold color. The women are drumming and Lewis plays his sax. They fold their words seamlessly into their music. Speaking from their hearts, they voice their anger stark and cold, shout out joy, whisper anguish. I am transfixed by the visual beauty of their tableau and by my sense of their shared spirit. I appreciate how they keep catching each other's eye, smiling, nodding signals and encouragement. The team's expression of its Black self-knowing as *oppositional consciousness* feels profound.

Now it is our turn. I feel scared. We all move hesitantly to sit in a circle on the floor. We are gathered around the altar (a symbolic centerpiece that we create at the beginning of each cohort weekend). Today the altar includes a vase of spring flowers, candles, and a few small figurines brought by some students to represent hope.

We sit in hesitancy, heads down, making furtive eye contact. Mark handed out the white cardboard body parts, but I didn't get one. I clutch a roll of white crepe paper streamers. Someone finally murmurs something. Soon we are all standing and moving about the room. I hear individual voices shouting, "I want it my way, my way!" "You're doing it wrong!" Voices rise in cacophony. I see bodies shuffling in all directions, pushing, hugging, veering off alone. I notice the clamor as people wave the white cardboard body parts with words printed on them like "Conformity," "Individualism," "Loneliness."

I try to connect. I approach several people, stretching out my arms with yearning, offering a crepe paper streamer that might link us. They turn their backs and walk away.

The energy is dissipating. No one has spoken direction, but we find ourselves quieting, returning to the center of the room. This time we stand in a circle, arms tenderly around each other, gazing into one another's eyes.

I look at the Black team, hoping for acceptance. Their eyes are big, their faces masks of horror. They are pointing at something in front of me and I look down. I gasp in disbelief. We have completely trampled the altar. The vase is kicked over, water spilled, the flowers scattered. Figurines are knocked about.

I feel awash with shame.

This marks the end of my present-tense account. Later, the Black team wrote a reflection on its members' felt encounter with our White team presentation:

As a Black team we watched what the White team presented to us in horror and shock. It validated our knowing about how unconscious White people are. The improvisational depiction of white paper scattered all over the room in no particular pattern with many bodies crying for attention or demanding their right to be an individual and to exert their power was frightening to some of us. We watched as their process desecrated the altar we normally set up for all of our weekend intensives; they trampled right over it. For us as Black people, this was a metaphor for how we have experienced White culture—of being trampled on without concern. . . . This clearly was a class assignment, yet the feelings we felt in our bodies were very real, alarming and validating

at the same time. (Black Team Voice in Barlas, Cherry-Smith, Rosenwasser, & Winlock, forthcoming)

My felt encounter with White consciousness affected me profoundly. Even as I write this narrative 5 years later, my breath again grows shallow and my stomach clenches as I relive the experience. I feel the loneliness and yearning. I see the trashed altar and feel the despair in my shame. I believe that most of us that day felt a direct encounter with what it means to be White. When our White team renewed its discourse about White consciousness, we found that our experience had catalyzed a new quality of reflective discourse.

Later, I learned that the Black team's presentation, which appeared to me to be so well-rehearsed, had also been improvisational. I asked what Black team meetings had been like and learned that members explored deep individual differences, just as the White team did. In contrast to our team, who shifted quickly to reflective discourse after hearing each other's stories, the Black team used affective and body-based strategies to explore individual differences and find commonalities.

Recently, I asked one of the Black team members what she had learned during her three years in the cohort curriculum. Without hesitation, she answered, "One thing I learned is that white people really are that unconscious. I am fifty years old, and my whole life I've thought that white people had to do this stuff on purpose because nobody could be so dumb. I knew if I did the things White folks do, I'd be doing it with malice. And now I can see. . . ." Her voice trailed off, then shaking her head in disbelief and revelation, she continued, ". . . they really don't do these dumb things on purpose."

## TWO VIEWS OF LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE—PRAGMATISM AND PHENOMENOLOGY

Elizabeth's story illustrates how the White team used two different approaches to learn from experience. Up until its chaotic presentation, the White team created meaning primarily through discourse. Although individual identity stories were told and received in a context of emotional receptivity, when the group made meaning from these stories, it moved quickly to analysis. During its presentation of White self-knowing, the team engaged a full-bodied, experience-based way of knowing. We now discuss the theoretical foundation for understanding the difference between these two perspectives on experience as a source of meaning.

### *Pragmatism and Learning From Experience*

Learning from experience is a foundational concept in adult education. Admittedly, experience is a tricky concept. It is an ambiguous term that, as noted by David Boud, Ruth Cohen, and David Walker (1993), is sometimes used as a verb and other times as a noun: "as a verb . . . it is either a particular instance or a particular process

of observing, undergoing or encountering. As a noun, it is all that is known, the knowledge or practical wisdom gained from the observing, undergoing, or encountering" (p. 6). This distinction between experience as a noun or verb gets to the heart of the difference between pragmatist and phenomenological perspectives. Among North American, and especially U. S. adult educators, experience has been conceptualized as a noun, a resource that can be catalogued, objectified, and reflected on. This understanding of experience has been significantly influenced by the writings of John Dewey (1958) who, following the tradition of radical empiricism articulated by William James (1978), developed a theory of experience that has come to be identified as pragmatism. Adult learning theorists as diverse as David Boud (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993; Boud & Miller, 1996), Rosemary Caffarella and Sharan Merriam (2000), Peter Jarvis (1987), David Kolb (1984), and Jack Mezirow (1991, 2000) appear to be influenced by the pragmatist understanding of how experience relates to learning. Tara Fenwick (2000) identifies this understanding as the reflection-oriented constructivist perspective, labeling it as a prevalent and influential adult learning theory that "casts the individual as a central actor in a drama of personal meaning-making" (p. 248). To capture the essence of this pragmatist tradition, we briefly describe three perspectives.

David Kolb (1984), whose work is influential among adult educators in higher education and corporate training, theorizes that learning from experience is an interaction between two processes—experience is first taken in or grasped, then transformed into meaning. Each process is a bipolar continuum with the poles in dialectic interaction. Kolb calls the process of grasping experience the continuum of *prehension*, with *apprehension* (concrete experience, associated with feeling) at one pole and *comprehension* (abstract conceptualization, associated with thought) at the other. Apprehension relies "on the tangible, felt qualities of immediate experience" and comprehension relies "on conceptual interpretation and symbolic representation" (p. 41). Acknowledging James for providing a "best" (p. 44) description of the distinction he is making, Kolb cites James' 1890 volume on psychology:

There are two kinds of knowledge . . . *knowledge of acquaintance* and *knowledge about*. . . . We can relapse at will into a mere condition of acquaintance with an object by scattering our attention and staring at it in a vacuous trance-like way. . . . Through feelings we become acquainted with things, but only by our thoughts do we know about them. (James cited in Kolb, 1984, p. 44)

Although Kolb argues that apprehension (feeling) and comprehension (thought) are in dialectic interaction, the learning cycle he describes seems to privilege thought. John Heron, in his own analysis of how James privileges thought, quips, "that while it all starts with acquaintance, this is a pretty minimal business until we get knowledge-about going" (1992, p. 163). Turning his attention to Kolb, and continuing with the same line of analysis, Heron (1992) observes:

The notion of feeling is nowhere defined or elaborated in the whole book. . . . The result is, of course, that the concept of concrete experience itself is nowhere properly explored. . . . The model is really about reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation—for which an indeterminate concrete experience is the necessary crude fuel. This model is a highly intellectual account of experiential learning based entirely on the paradigm of scientific inquiry, in the tradition of Dewey, Lewin, Piaget and Kelly. (pp. 194-195)

Jack Mezirow's (1991, 2000) writing has been a catalyzing force within the field of adult education for focusing attention on adult learning. Integrating reflection-oriented constructivism with the highly rationalistic model of critical theory expounded by Jurgen Habermas, Mezirow defines learning as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to future action" (2000, p. 5). From his writing we surmise that he perceives experience to be a stimulus from the life-world that becomes important when it provokes reflection and critical reflection. Mezirow distinguishes actual experience from our linguistic knowing of it. He appears to reject or at least overlook the importance of bringing actual experience into extralinguistic awareness when he argues that what we experience is "our categories" of experience:

Experience strengthens our personal category systems by reinforcing our expectations about how things are supposed to be and about the circumstances in which the rules for a particular language game are appropriate. What we actually experience nonetheless remains a category that is evoked by a particular stimulus, not an occurrence in the real world. (1991, p. 146)

In Mezirow's model, one takes the content of experience, which is already interpreted, and treats it as something to be reflected on. Experience becomes coterminous with the meaning we attach to it.

Another theorist influential with adult educators is David Boud, who has inquired about the nature of learning from experience. In the tradition of pragmatism, Boud perceives experience to be the foundation of all learning, but not a distinct form of knowing. Boud and colleagues reject the idea that sensation is the same as experience: "In our view, the idea of experience has within it judgment, thought, and connectedness with other experience . . . it always comes with meaning" (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993, p. 6).

In each of the above models, the focus is on experience as a noun. For Kolb, concrete experience, which is the direct felt encounter that James calls knowledge of acquaintance, is acknowledged but underdeveloped theoretically. Mezirow and Boud share similar conceptions: Brought into linguistic consciousness and reflected upon, experience is not the direct sensation of felt encounter but is the meaning that we make of that encounter.

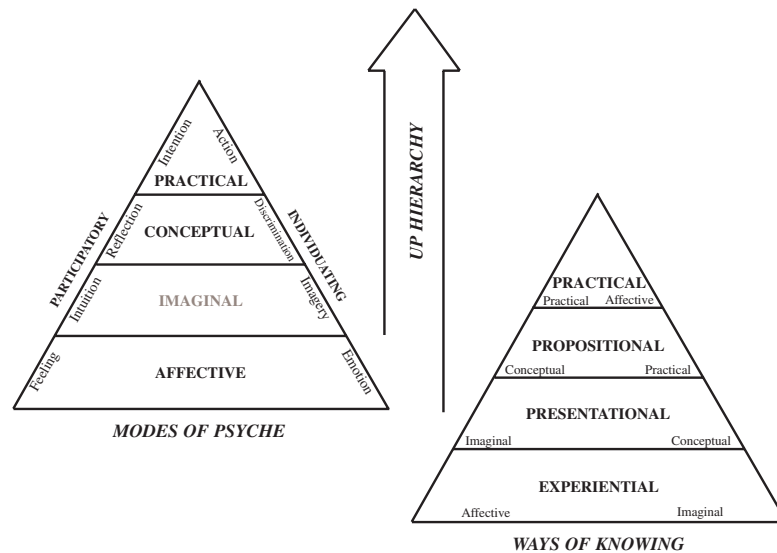
*Heron's Epistemology of Feeling—  
A Phenomenological Perspective*

John Heron captures an alternative point of view. In his 1992 book *Feeling and Personhood* Heron outlines an integrated theory of human psyche in which he treats experience as a process, an encounter with the world. Grounded in phenomenology, he writes, "Presences are presences and images are images. To interpret them in words and concepts, and then suppose that the interpretation is what really matters, is to miss their point" (Heron, 1996, p. 185). From Heron's phenomenological point of view emerge three factors that have great potential value for the theoretical framing of affect's relationship to learning: (1) the nature of experience as felt encounter, as verb instead of noun, (2) the perception that multiple ways of knowing must be balanced, each with its own canon of validity, and (3) a theoretical distinction between feeling and emotion.

Heron (1992) describes the psyche as having four primary modes of functioning that "are all in play to some degree at all times in waking life" (p. 14). These four modes of psyche are the affective, imaginal, conceptual, and practical (see the Modes of Psyche pyramid in Figure 1). Each mode includes two processes: "The affective mode embraces feeling and emotion. . . . The imaginal mode comprises intuition and imagery. . . . The conceptual mode includes reflection and discrimination. And the practical mode involves intention and action" (pp. 14-15). "Within the psyche . . . there is . . . a basic polarity between an individuating function and a participatory one" (p. 15). Within the affective mode of psyche, emotion is an expression of the individuating function; emotion is "the intense, localized affect that arises from the fulfillment or the frustration of individual needs and interests" (p. 16). Feeling represents the participatory pole. Acknowledging that he assigns a "special usage" to the meaning of feeling, Heron writes that feeling refers "to the capacity of the psyche to participate in wider unities of being. . . . This is the domain of empathy, indwelling, participation, presence, resonance, and such like" (p. 16). The other three modes of psyche also include participatory and individuating functions. In Figure 1 the participatory functions are written on the Modes of Psyche pyramid's left side, the individuating processes on the right.

Arising from these modes of psyche are four ways of knowing—experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical. Heron writes that experiential knowing is evident when we meet and feel the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process, or thing. Presentational knowing is evident in our intuitive grasp of the significance of imaginal patterns as expressed in graphic, plastic, moving, musical, and verbal art forms. Propositional knowing is expressed in intellectual statements, both verbal and numeric, organized in ways that do not infringe the rules of logic and evidence. Practical knowing is evident in knowing how to exercise a skill (1992, pp. 162-171; 1996, p. 33). Each way of knowing is situated within two modes of psyche, one more primary than the other (1992, p. 157). Thus, for example, experiential knowing arises primarily from the affective mode of psyche with





**Figure 1. John Heron's Conceptualization of Modes of Psyche and Ways of Knowing**

Note: This figure is adapted from *Feeling and Personhood* (Heron, 1992), Figure 2.2 (p. 20) and Figure 8.3 (p. 174).

added support from the imaginal. The complete set of relationships is depicted in Figure 1 in the Ways of Knowing pyramid.

Heron uses a pyramid configuration to convey what he calls an "up-hierarchy" (1992, p. 174), meaning that each layer in the pyramid is grounded in the layers below. Thus, experiential knowing is the ground of all other forms of knowing. Arising from the affective and imaginal modes of psyche, experiential knowing depends on the processes of feeling and emotion, intuition, and imagery. Heron provides numerous exercises and facilitative strategies that can help learners develop capacity for engaging these four processes (1992, 1999).

Each way of knowing must be judged on its own terms. At the same time, because of the up-hierarchy, the validity of each way of knowing is also dependent on the ways of knowing that ground it, meaning that the validity canons for experiential knowing are the "touchstone for the validity of all higher sets of transactions" (1992, p. 162). The learner's "developmental challenge" is to become adept at a process called "critical subjectivity," which "involves an awareness of the four ways of knowing, of how they are currently interacting, and of ways of changing the relations between them so that they articulate a reality that is unclouded by a restrictive and ill-disciplined subjectivity" (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 281). Effective exercise of critical subjectivity leads to congruence among the ways of knowing. When



incongruence is sensed, the learner must search for alignment by re-engaging in experiential knowing, located in feeling and emotion, intuition and imagery.

### TOWARD WHOLE-PERSON LEARNING AND HABITS OF BEING

We have asserted that the difference between a pragmatic and a phenomenological understanding of experience goes to the heart of the ongoing discourse in adult education about the need for a more wholistic theory of learning. In the pragmatist point of view, experience is a resource for learning that takes on meaning when we make it the object of reflection. Experience becomes a phenomenon that can be named; it becomes a noun. The learner develops knowledge about the phenomenon. This perspective on experience affects how educators conceptualize emotions. Emotional life becomes an aspect of experience, and thus a phenomenon serving as an object for reflection. In the phenomenological point of view, experience is the state of being in felt encounter; it is a verb. Emotional life is part of experiential knowing, which is conceptualized as its own way of knowing with its own canon of validity. When James describes this way of knowing with phrases like "relapse . . . into a mere condition of acquaintance" and "staring . . . in a vacuous trance-like way," he expresses the pragmatist's difficulty in appreciating the value of being in a state of encounter, of engaging knowledge of acquaintance for its own sake. As Heron observes, from the pragmatist's perspective "this is a pretty minimal business until we get knowledge-about going" (1992, p. 163).

The phrase "multiple ways of knowing" has great currency in contemporary adult education discourse. A steady drumbeat of studies documents the importance of the affective as an important element in the transformative learning process (Barlas, 2000; Clark, 1993; Egan, 1985; Hunter, 1980; Scott, 1991; Taylor, 1994). Feminist scholars emphasize the importance of the affective dimension of learning (Loughlin, 1993; Ruddick, 1996). Many educators critique the hegemonic force of an epistemology that privileges rationality. For example, Elana Michelson (1996) observes from her position of feminist, class, and racial critique, "The cerebral, the objective, the universal are seen as superior to the subjective and particular . . . [in order] to have power over experience" (p. 444). Mary Stone Hanley (Tisdell, Hanley, & Taylor, 2000) characterizes Anglocentric culture as emotionally repressed and argues that overreliance on the mind limits learning. After advocating for an equal emphasis on the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning, Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993) note the challenge, "In contemporary English-speaking society, there is a cultural bias towards the cognitive and conative aspects of learning. The development of affect is inhibited . . . leading to a lack of emphasis on people as whole persons" (pp. 12-13).

We are suggesting that the pragmatist view of experience, which ultimately casts affective knowing as an object for reflection, so permeates adult education discourse that it has narrowed our theoretical vision and truncated our practice.

Although many adult educators are interested in promoting multiple ways of knowing, without a theoretical map to guide them they often struggle with trying to integrate emotion and feeling into the learning experience, and with their own comfort level when emotion and feeling emerge in the learning process (Tisdell, Hanley, & Taylor, 2000, pp. 137-140). We further suggest that considering experience as a verb, with Heron's framing of a felt encounter at the base of learning, is a useful theoretical perspective that can provide a foundation for practitioners in intentionally designing learning processes that provide for balance among multiple ways of knowing. We have found from our experience that fostering the artful interdependence of four ways of knowing—experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical—supports learners as whole persons and ultimately supports their capacity to learn deeply. The learning activity in Elizabeth's story, to which we will return, illustrates multiple ways of knowing at work.

The phrase *habits of mind*, recently adopted by Mezirow (2000) to refer to what in earlier work he called *meaning perspective*, can also serve as a metaphor for the conceptual and rational approach that privileges the cognitive. We suggest that a theoretical framework that emphasizes a balance among multiple ways of knowing is captured more appropriately with an alternative phrase, *habits of being*.

### LEARNING-WITHIN-RELATIONSHIP AND THE PARADOX OF DIVERSITY

We now describe our vision of how diverse learner perspectives are engaged within the phenomenologically-based understanding of experience. We call this phenomenon *learning-within-relationship*,<sup>1</sup> a process in which persons strive to become engaged with both their own whole-person knowing and the whole-person knowing of their fellow learners. Engagement with one's own whole-person knowing requires critical subjectivity while developing capacity for the skillful practice of multiple ways of knowing. Engagement with the whole person of fellow learners requires interacting with others through the same balanced mix in ways of knowing—through affective and imaginal modes of psyche, as well as conceptual and practical. To share with another one's own experiential knowing, which is grounded in the affective and imaginal, requires striving to nurture a field of empathic connection. Such a field of empathic connection establishes a group habit of being.

#### *Developing Empathic Knowing Amid Diversity*

More practiced as facilitators of reflection and reflective discourse than of empathic connection, we have long been aware of the caution that discourse requires preconditions of trust, solidarity, security, and empathy (Kasl, Marsick, & Dechant, 1997; Mezirow, 1991, 2000). However, we have found scant guidance in how to create these conditions. We have been challenged to find ways of entering

the whole-person knowing of others when the setting for a range of reasons does not provide space, openness, or support for beginning with an intensive focus on coming into a sense of felt connection.

Believing that empathy is a precondition for trust, solidarity, and security, we concentrate our attention on empathy. We suggest that the scant attention paid to how an empathic field can be created is due, in part, to an assumption of homogeneity. Participants who share common background often establish an empathic field without consciously trying. They are able to understand each other's words in the context of the other's felt experience because their experiences are similar. Thus, learning through discourse is successful, appearing to validate a learning theory that privileges discourse.

A fault-line in the theory appears when learners are very different from each other. Being told through words about experience is insufficient when there is little or no common experiential grounding. One cannot "try on" the other's point of view, as, for example, Mezirow (2000, p. 20) advocates, without also being able to "try on" (or live within) the other's experiential knowing from which the point of view arises. Living within another's point of view is the essence of empathic understanding.

Our experience as adult educators seeking to become increasingly skillful in working with diverse learners leads us to define this challenge as the *paradox of diversity*, which we express as follows: the more diverse the perspectives among a group of learners, the more likely it is that they will challenge each other's habits of mind and habits of being. Thus, diversity is directly and positively related to possibility for growth and transformation. At the same time, it is also negatively related: the more diverse the learners, the less likely it is that they will be able to create an empathic field that enables them to understand the other's point of view, thus blocking their capacity to lead each other toward growth and transformation.

#### *Fostering Learning-Within-Relationship*

Casting experience as a verb instead of a noun—that is, conceptualizing experience phenomenologically instead of pragmatically—leads educators to examine how they can assist learners in sharing a felt sense of the other's experience instead of reflecting on its meaning. Heron's (1992) distinction between emotion and feeling is particularly relevant here. He conceptualizes *emotion* as "the intense, localized affect that arises from the fulfillment or the frustration of individual needs and interests," the individuating function in the psyche's affective mode; theorizing the domain of empathy, he conceptualizes *feeling*, which is "the capacity of the psyche to participate in wider unities of being" (p. 16). Feeling is the participatory function in the psyche's affective mode. Learners enter into this domain through mutual attunement, described as "being present with each other in the mode of feeling, by some form of interactive meditation"; mutual attunement can be facilitated after "a short period of doing whatever emotional or interpersonal work is needed" (p. 243).

We find that Heron's small phrase acknowledging emotional and interpersonal work as a precondition for empathic understanding is as large an understatement as Mezirow's small phrase that empathy is a precondition for discourse. Having derived the paradox of diversity from our own lived experience, we have a healthy regard for the magnitude of its challenge. Pondering how an empathic field is promoted amid great diversity, we are drawn to the pivotal role of presentational knowing—the intuitive grasp of the significance of imaginal patterns as expressed in graphic, plastic, moving, musical, and verbal art forms. Presentational knowing provides a bridge between the extralinguistic nature of felt experience, which an individual cannot directly communicate, and the ideas communicated through propositional knowing, which is the mode of discourse.

Presentational knowing assists learners with knowing themselves and others as whole persons. Presentational knowing can help the learner connect with his or her own experiential knowing by bringing felt experience into conscious awareness. When learners begin with expressive processes, they often are made aware of emotions that they are bringing to the learning encounter. With increased awareness, learners are more able to create congruence between their affective states and their conceptual sense-making, thus bringing more authentic participation to propositional knowing and discourse. Presentational knowing also helps learners bridge differences by affording glimpses into the other's world of felt experience, thus creating pathways for empathic connection.

We suggest that adult educators routinely develop strategies that provide pathways into the felt knowing of the self and others. These pathways may include drawing, dance, story-telling, and other forms of expression, which are frequently used as a part of experiential learning. These activities, however, are often relegated to secondary roles, being perceived by educators as a diversion from the "real" learning, which is lodged in reflection and analysis.

We are suggesting that Heron's theory offers one conceptual map for how multiple ways of knowing are integrated in order to engage the whole person in learning. A vibrant inquiry-based discourse about a phenomenological understanding of experience and whole-person learning is likely to lead to other such maps useful for guiding practice. Although counter-cultural, such maps will provide valuable theoretical perspectives that give affect a central role in adult learning, one that is balanced with rational and practical knowing. Balance and congruence among the different ways of knowing are central to wholistic learning. Each way of knowing provides a validity check on the other.

### INTERPRETING ELIZABETH'S STORY

Within a phenomenology of experience, we can now demonstrate how Elizabeth's story illustrates engagement with one's own whole-person knowing and the whole-person knowing of others.

The White team members worked intensely for three months to craft a mutually-held understanding of White consciousness. Members appreciatively received individual identity stories in an environment of care and emotional support. With time constraints often driving the team's process, members moved quickly to reflective discourse in quest of the team's goal, agreement about essential themes of White consciousness. The individual identity stories became objects for reflection, as team members interacted through propositional knowing. Many emotional eruptions punctuated the process. By and large, the group paused respectfully for these expressions, then returned to the meaning-making process, folding each new expression of emotion into its analysis. Eventually, the team gathered its understanding of White consciousness under a conceptual umbrella and named the experience as "the constructed dualism of self and other."

When it came time to plan the team's presentation of White self-knowing, the team met an impasse. In trying to forge a plan of action, members discovered that the themes on which they thought they agreed had different meanings for different individuals. From a theoretical perspective, they discovered they could not imagine how to translate their propositional knowing into practical action because the propositional statements accounted inadequately for their experiential knowing. To use Heron's model, their process had not fostered critical subjectivity, the awareness that brings all ways of knowing into congruence.

Lacking the congruence of whole-person knowing within themselves, White team members could not create an empathic field of feeling among themselves. Although they listened respectfully when emotions ran high, the synergic inquiry process of "other knowing" was insufficiently explored. Members might have learned to "try on the emotional perspective" of the other had they used presentational knowing to assist themselves in linking experiential and propositional knowing. Elizabeth discovered, when she inquired, that Black team meetings were filled with presentational exploration of differences and commonalities.

On the day of the team's presentation, the White team members used presentational knowing. Guided by an overall intention to show "the constructed dualism of self and other, . . . [which] sets up the conditions for 'isms' to exist," the team entered into a cacophony of individual expression. Through these expressions, team members created the tangles and litter of white paper, the self-absorbed destructive force that trampled the altar. We do not know from the story what others experienced, but we know that Elizabeth had a felt sense of alienating chaos, of yearning for connection, of shame. We suggest that the example illustrates how presentational knowing can serve as a pathway to experiential knowing. From her personal felt experience as she attempted to express the White team's construct of dualism and from her observations of other team members engaged in the same expression, Elizabeth came into direct encounter with the "being-ness" of White consciousness. This direct encounter, she reports, affected her profoundly. She also reports that after the team's presentation, it experienced "a new quality of reflective discourse." If we assume that other team members had similar experiences of being

in felt encounter with White consciousness, we observe that the team's propositional knowing was now grounded in its own felt experience, thus enabling congruence.

In the example of Elizabeth's story, we also see how presentational knowing bridges difference, smoothing a pathway for empathic knowing. Members of the Black team were not surprised by the chaos and destructive force of White consciousness; they feel its presence on a daily basis and perceived their knowledge "validated" by the White team's presentation. But for at least one Black team member, something else happened. She glimpsed a felt knowing of what it is like to be White, and in that empathic moment, knew the *unconsciousness* of White consciousness. For years she had interpreted "the things White folks do" through the lens of her own experiential knowing, knowing that if she did these "dumb things," she would be acting "with malice." From her experience in this cohort, she acquired some capacity to "try on" white consciousness, "And now I can see they really *don't* do these dumb things on purpose."

We do not wish to overstate the impact of one moment in the life of this cohort's 3-year experience. During the course of its 3-year curriculum, this group of adult learners continually blended multiple ways of knowing. Elizabeth's story is one among many that helped the group find pathways of empathic connection.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although adult educators have long recognized that affect plays an important role in learning, its role has been undertheorized. In part, this reflects a strong cultural bias in English-speaking society for subordinating feeling and emotion to rational, propositional thought and discourse. One consequence of this undertheorizing is the tendency for writers in adult education to conceptualize rational discourse and the affective as separate and distinct from one another, even while acknowledging that people learn wholistically. Another consequence of this undertheorizing is a lack of guidance to educators for working with the affective domain in balance with other domains of knowing. Consequently, educators are often ambivalent about the emergence of affect during learning events, expressing discomfort or uncertainty about its appropriate role.

We propose that a phenomenologically-based perspective on experience provides an alternative perspective to the way in which experience is typically conceptualized in the adult learning literature that is most influential in North America. Heron's theory of feeling and personhood serves as one portal of entry into this perspective, which we are suggesting should be part of the discourse about adult learning. A phenomenological perspective positions experience as a verb, not a noun—as a process intrinsic to habits of being, not an object that fuels concept making. This alternative perspective, we argue, rectifies an important limitation of adult learning theory. Although counter-cultural in its implications, but more congruent with human experience, it positions affect as a central feature of learning.

The resulting theoretical map provides educators with guidance for how to work with emotion and feeling. We believe that educators who can facilitate empathic knowing as a foundation for learning-within-relationship are needed to meet the challenges of increasingly diverse communities.

We believe that creating empathic knowing for learning-within-relationship characterized by the paradox of difference is both possible and powerful for many kinds of settings. Learning strategies such as cohorts (Barlas, 2000; Cohen & Piper, 2000), collaborative inquiry (Bray, Lee, Smith, & Yorks, 2000; Heron, 1996; Kasl & Yorks, in press; Yorks & Kasl, in press), and synergic inquiry (Tang, 1997; Elias, 2000) provide ideal structures for creative applications of building both empathic knowing and eventually establishing an empathic field. Although these structures are particularly companionable with wholistic knowing, the structures themselves do not guarantee actualization of balanced engagement with multiple ways of knowing. The practitioner accustomed to privileging propositional knowing and discourse might easily inhabit these strategies with imbalance. A phenomenologically-based perspective on experience highlights the role of presentational expressions of knowing in a way that suggests how these expressive ways of knowing can be used in balance with other ways of knowing. Consistent with the view of this article, we argue that adult educators have much to gain from inquiry into their own multiple ways of knowing with the intention of building a phenomenologically-based body of theory for guiding practice.

## NOTE

1. Our use of the term *learning-within-relationship* is influenced by the Group for Collaborative Inquiry's (1994) discussion of what it calls *learning-in-relationship* as well as by Gwendolyn Kaltoft's (1990) discussion of what she calls *self-in-relationship*.

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