

ADULT EDUCATION AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH, THEORY AND PRACTICE

Sherman Stanage. 1987. Malabar, Florida: Robert E. Krieger.

In an area of study as large and diverse as adult education, a perspective that so clearly positions the understanding of what it is to be a person at the heart of its subject matter is a welcome clarification. Stanage argues that phenomenological research permits us to come to a greater consciousness of ourselves in a way not afforded to us in adult education activities that turn authority over to the principal textbooks and course content. But in spite of the clear positioning of the "vital lives of individually unique adults" at the centre of adult education, Stanage's methodology raises major questions and leads to untenable conclusions about adult education.

Central to Stanage's phenomenology is the notion of person as distinct from person. "Person is the full eduction (drawing forth) of what persons are and have in common; it makes possible communication on the basis of intersubjectivity with the co-existence of person." (p. 37) This topic, "the eduction of person," is alternately described as both the observation and the participation in one's consciousing. Although it makes for awkward wording at times, Stanage's precise use of language distinguishes the active experience of consciousing from the state of being conscious or possessing consciousness. The eduction of person, as one of the central underpinnings of the book, explains how we may engage in and investigate the phenomena of our own eduction. It is through feeling, experiencing and consciousing, that we come to know our life-world.

Stanage explains that the eductions or leading out of persons are the consciousing of the phenomena of doing. An exploration of the phenomena that constitute our lives, such as intuiting, describing, and relating, underlies interpretation of meaning and "the end result is that we do come to know better and better." To investigate the subject matter of adult education — that is, the adult education of person — the choice, according to Stanage, is between either the more traditional quantitative methods or phenomenological methodology.

One of the highlights of the book is the discussion of a philosophical ground for adult education. Stanage states that adult education can claim a place as a "rigorous human science" with the phenomenological investigation of the eduction of person as its subject matter. Furthermore, adult education is not a

discipline in the sense of the physical or social sciences because its subject matter is not a "carefully circumscribed branch of knowledge or instruction." I think that this philosophical distinction between adult education and the sciences is a very important one. The distinction will provide, along with some debate, a useful grounding upon which to orient future directions for adult education as well as to understand better what others in the field have already been doing.

Rather than a specific body of knowledge, adult education is concerned instead with the problems and media in which adults are situated. The impossibility of classifying and accounting for all the situations in which adults find themselves, however, does not stop the proliferation of "how-to-do-it" approaches of many adult educators (p. 99). Without an appreciation of the person-centredness of adult education, these "how-to-do-it" approaches take as their centre the authority of the manual or principal text. Relegated to secondary importance are the "vital lives of individually unique adults." The meaning that any of this subject-centred instruction has for anyone, including the educator, is often of no importance.

In the adult education of person described by Stanage, the emphasis on leading oneself out into a consciousness state is what I would describe as a detour that runs the risk of never getting back on the road again. The question implied in "What am I to do?" is not satisfactorily answered by a large accumulation of self-knowledge, even if the process used to gather the data is a dynamic one. The implication is that by accumulating knowledge of ourselves, we can, after some critical mass has been reached, move toward meaning, understanding and action. But it is never quite clear just how much data collection is necessary before one takes action on the conclusions.

The phenomenological investigation, while it makes no claim to being objective, does not escape the dangers of reductionism. Phenomenology brackets all experience of its constituent parts. From this position such things as relevancy and meaning may then be reconstituted. The problem with any analytical system is that if one part is missing in the reconstitution, then the original cannot be truly represented. There remains only an impaired system for want of the missing part(s), or a description of what the system would look like and how it would behave or act if it were operating in its completeness. This problem of the analysis of experience is not overcome by the phenomenological investigation of person by person.

Stanage has prepared wonderfully elaborate schema to describe the essential structures and functions of person composed of nine constituting clusters of phenomena including "consciousings, experiencings and feelings." (p. 8) The problem is that Stanage's schema of a highly personalized, reflexive, internalized search for self does not necessarily result in practice. Does self-knowledge gained through reflection promote anything more than theory or knowledge of the right action that we may adopt if we choose to do so? Although we may be able to answer "What am I to do?", merely possessing knowledge of the answer may never be sufficient for putting oneself into practice and doing it.

"Appendix II" is the course syllabus of the seminar "Phenomenology and Adult Education" conducted by Stanage. In many ways the book appears to be a conclusion of some issues arising from the seminar, as the book references authors on the reading list and contains samples of student work. Although the reader may benefit from the reading assignments, the book does not give instructions on how-to-do phenomenology in step-by-step detail, probably because such instructions are even more impossible than for most other important activities such as walking, drinking water, or riding a bicycle.

At one point Stanage asks whether the "matrices of relationships" by which adults order their lives are causal. This pertinent question encourages the reader to wonder whether self-reflection according to Stanage's matrix of feelings, experiencings, consciousings, and other actions, accounts in a causal fashion for the ordering of one's life. This method gives the impression that by accumulating knowledge of ourselves we can, after sufficient self-reflection, move toward meaning, understanding, and action. Stanage's activities with his students may have led them to an ordering and understanding of themselves. But I wonder about his methodological need for an underlying theory, schema, essence and the presumption that students can observe the backstage activities in the drama that constitutes their lives. The suggestion that such a methodology is necessary or even possible obscures the understanding that, as in a drama, people's lives are lived out as players on the main stage.

The phenomenological methodology that emphasises self-reflexivity as a way of knowing obscures the understanding of ourselves as intersubjective beings. The lasting impression is that as human beings and learners, our educations are accomplished by ourselves. I think that the focus on self and the experiencing of

consciousness can leave us isolated and stranded before one of the important questions raised in the book, "What am I to do?"

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WOMEN'S WAYS OF KNOWING: THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF, VOICE AND MIND

M.F. Belenky, B.M. Clinchy, N.R. Goldberger and J.M. Tarule. 1986. New York: Basic Books.

Make no bones about it! This book is about power. Hence it will be of interest to those adult educators who have come to understand that epistemological questions like: what is truth? what is reality? what is authority? to whom do I listen? are not just questions for philosophers but ones which have profound consequences for empowerment. For those adult educators who have not yet read this book, a treat is in store. Unlike many books about adult learning, this one is not boring for it breathes and palpitates with life. Readers seldom feel indifferent about it. Any book that has excited so many adult education students (largely female) while being criticized largely on methodological grounds or ignored by academic adult educators (largely male) must have something interesting to say!

Readers either seem to "put themselves in the shoes of the women," or to criticize the work vigorously for its methodology or its lack of power analysis. In other words, those in academic life respond in one of two predictable ways: by a "connected" way of knowing, or by a "separated" way of knowing. Both are objective ways of knowing which the authors identify as aspects of procedural knowing. Neither one of these ways of knowing, however, accounts for that gnawing sense of truth which the subjective selves of many feel ("yes, this is the real cheese!") with the first reading of the book before being pressed into giving a more objective analysis.

What is this study all about? The authors interviewed 135 women; 90 were students enrolled in one of six academic institutions ranging from a prestigious women's college to inner city community colleges and an alternative high school. They also interviewed 45 women from family agencies that were concerned about assistance in parenting roles. A kind of content analysis was done by the coders who were "blind" as to the women's ages, ethnicity, social class and institutional affiliation. Building on the