

Articles

LEARNING TO NAME OUR LEARNING PROCESSES

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Abstract

What it is like to be an adult learner is suggested in this article as a basic area of inquiry in which teachers of adults should always be engaged, but not alone. What it is like to be a learner is transposed to the question of what learning processes the learner is experiencing. Adult learners have as much at stake in the exploration or inquiry as the teacher; they also are essential partners in the search for understanding, identification, and clarification. Ways to help learners to become co-inquirers, to name their own learning processes, are explored. A rich body of research dealing with learning processes, or what it is like to be an adult learner, is identified. The theoretical and practice ideas presented in the article are the result of ten years of experiential learning and reflection, studying theory and research, and supervising qualitative research projects.

Résumé

Cet article suggère que l'examen de ce que c'est que d'être un apprenant adulte devrait être un domaine de recherche dans lequel les éducateurs d'adultes ainsi que d'autres intervenants devraient toujours être engagés. Ce que c'est que d'être un apprenant adulte peut se traduire par la question quels sont les processus d'apprentissage chez l'apprenant. Celui-ci, tout comme l'enseignant, a intérêt à ce que cette question soit explorée; tous deux sont des partenaires essentiels dans leur démarche de compréhension, d'identification et de clarification. Des moyens pouvant aider les apprenants à devenir co-chercheurs et à identifier leurs propres processus d'apprentissage sont explorés. Un riche éventail de recherches traitant des processus d'apprentissage, ou de ce que c'est que d'être un apprenant adulte, est identifié. Les idées théoriques et pratiques émises dans cet article sont le fruit d'une décennie d'études et de réflexion expérimentielle, d'analyses théorique et pratique, et de direction de projets de recherche de type qualitatif.

Recently the CBC broadcast a program with the subject "What It's Like to Raise a Child." The next week the subject was "What It's Like to Be a Child." Very insightful programming! It suggests that to be effective as parents, it is useful to be sensitive to what it is like to be child.

Anyone who is a teacher of adults has probably asked, "What is it like to teach an adult learner?" The point of this article is to suggest we should also be asking, "What is it like to be an adult learner?" If we ask that question and learn from the answers we get, will we become more effective teachers? Will our learners find their learning more exciting and rewarding?

The intent in this article is to argue that it is important that we and our learners learn to name our learning processes, to describe alternative approaches to naming our learning processes, and to point out some of the difficulties in doing so. Some examples of research projects that have been done in this area are listed, and further research that is needed is identified.

I have spent the last ten years wrestling with these issues. In addition to indicating how I have gone about learning what adult learners are like through my teaching over those years, I briefly mention examples of research that students in our program at OISE have done to try to find answers to the question of what it is like to be an adult learner.

My answers to the questions about the impact of such inquiry on a teacher's effectiveness are subjective and based on my own experience as a facilitator in a graduate program, and on my resulting belief system. Readers who teach in non-university systems may also find the ideas relevant, since at a basic level, all learners share some common feelings and struggles.

Effectiveness in Teaching

The most obvious answer to the question of whether understanding what it is like to be an adult learner increases the teacher's effectiveness is that anything which makes the learner a more effective and powerful learner increases the effectiveness of the teacher! And a teacher can best help learners be more effective and powerful learners by understanding what it is like to be an adult learner and following through with behavior which grows out of that understanding. Being able to understand the perspective of the adult learner, and to see the world as he/she sees it is central to a learner centered approach.¹ And whatever one's educational philosophy, certainly this understanding is essential to implementing the old adult education maxim of "start where the learner is."

The important point in this argument is that for the teacher to understand what it is like to be an adult learner, he/she must ask the particular learners in a class or group at the moment. A generalized answer is helpful, but the particular answer for each learner is most crucial. Many students *in a class* may tell us a given exercise was very helpful or even inspiring. The more quiet ones may have failed to see the relevance of the exercise for them or their work. The ones who say absolutely nothing may be deeply disturbed by the activity. The teacher needs to know what is happening.

The teacher in this situation may think, "What is new about this? I know to ask learners for feedback about how a particular exercise affected them." And I agree. Feedback of the kind suggested in the above situation is

important, and is one way to find out some of what it is like to be an adult learner. But there is more learners can tell us; and more they can learn to tell us if we find ways to help them learn how, and if we listen carefully.

I am suggesting that learners find it empowering to be asked what they are experiencing (many have never been asked this by a teacher). And they find it even more empowering to develop the awareness and ability to say with ordinary words what they are experiencing. Another example will be useful here. Boyd and Fales² report interviews they did with learners who were known to be highly reflective learners. Their studies were about how learners reflect. People with whom Boyd and Fales talked initially couldn't tell them how they did it. It was such a natural process to them that they had not put into words what they did when reflecting. After talking with the researchers about their experience, the learners found they *could* describe their processes. Moreover, they felt a surge of new energy as a result, and they felt empowered as learners once they were able to describe or name their processes.

Learning Processes

Although the word "process" is a commonly used one in adult education, the concept of learning processes, as the inner happenings of a learner, is not widely recognized or used. What do we think of when we are asked to describe what it is like to be an adult learner? If we keep a learning journal of our own experiences of learning, what do we write about? Judging from the learners' journals I have seen, I think most people write about the events or activities in which they are engaged, and the learning that results. These are important to note in a learning journal but they are not what I mean by learning processes. Other kinds of entries in a journal might include problems we are having in learning, solutions we are finding to help us learn more effectively and the people with whom we are interacting: who is helpful, who is not, and why. Learners often record not only what they have learned about the subject being studied, but also what they are learning about themselves as they engage in these activities and as they reflect about those experiences as they write. Not to be overlooked is the meaning the learning of content or the self-awareness has for the learner. These kinds of journals approach very closely what I mean by learning processes. What is relevant here in these records is **not** the events and activities and **not** the subject-related learnings, except that these provide the context for exploring what is happening within the learner at a different level. What is relevant are the processes such as those hinted at above: **reflecting** on activities; **identifying** what has been learned; **deciding** with whom to interact and for what purpose; **developing** ways to interact with other learners; **deepening** a self-awareness; **finding** personal meaning in the learning; **learning** from emotional reactions; and **diagnosing** and **solving** learning problems. Thelma Barer-Stein presented a more intricate set of learning processes in the first issue of this Journal.³

Now that some learning processes have been suggested, one can look more closely at what a learning process is. (1) It is what is happening, denoting action. (2) The action is something that happens within the learner. It cannot be seen by the outside observer. (3) Processes being experienced by a learner are influenced by the state of the learner and his/her past experience, as well as by the activities in the learning setting or classroom. The implication of this statement is that no two learners in the same classroom, doing the same activity, will be experiencing the same process. (4) It is something that happens over time; it is not a quick once-and-done event. It is a dynamic happening that flows with a life history of its own. Heider has called this process a vibratory pattern.⁴ I would modify his idea to "a process is a vibratory patterning."

A patterning is, in my usage here, an act of finding that seemingly disparate experiences fit together in some kind of relationship that has meaning to the learner.

Approaches to Identifying Processes

Over the years, I have used several different approaches to identifying learning processes that learners might be experiencing (see figure 1). My first approach was to make a list of learning processes I thought learners might find in their experience. I developed this list from a variety of sources. I based it partly on theory I found relevant to my style of teaching or to the philosophy I was trying to implement. I based it partly on my awareness of my own learning. Another source was my recollection of things learners had told me of their struggles, thoughts, emotions, and joys: whatever discussions with previous students had revealed to me. Another source was research on learning, most of which was done from the perspective of the researcher and was limited to the frameworks known before the study was done.

A different approach to research, and one that is growing more common, is that done from the perspective of the learner.⁵ In these studies, the researchers start with no framework, except their own biases which they are obliged to reveal as fully as they can to the reader. They then attempt to find how learners understand their experiences and processes. They may add none or a lot of their own interpretation in the analysis of the data from learners, but once again they tell the reader how they reached their conclusions. I have supervised many dissertations of this type, and at first, used them to expand my list of likely processes. Until recently, I was troubled by the fact that the researchers wanted desperately to start their research free of a framework (not because they didn't know of a framework they could use, but because they believed in letting the makings of a framework emerge from the learner). However, then they proceeded to develop a framework for other researchers or learners to use. I now see these studies as very useful for many learners because they open up the possibilities of what learning processes can be and give the next learners a vocabulary with which they can think and reflect. These next learners then

can also reject what the researcher has reported as being different from their own experience. Using these research reports in a "sharing of stories" way, rather than in a "prescriptive" way led to the second approach.

A second approach to identifying processes, which is very different from the first, is to encourage the learners to name their own processes. Learners are not accustomed to doing this, nor do they have any training in doing so. They often find it very helpful to read the "stories" of other learners, particularly if the stories are about experiences they have just had, but are having difficulty finding the words to describe those experiences. I have often had learners tell me that they have found a term paper written by another student who was previously in the class they presently are taking to be very useful because it helps them know that another person has had the same difficulty as they and found a solution. Students who are experiencing perspective transformations (Mezirow first introduced this term to adult education)⁶ as part of their learning sometimes do not know what is happening to them until they read another person's story of what it was like for him or her. And then they say, "Oh! there is a name for what I'm going through. Other people have felt the confusion I have. I'm not the only one! I felt very lonely and lost until I read ___'s paper." These stories sometimes appear in term papers (I make copies of term papers available for other students to read only with the author's permission) or in a thesis. Many of the theses I will list later are rich with stories of learners' experiences. Academic books, autobiographies, or novels are sometimes sources of learners' stories and words to describe their experiences.

In qualitative theses the researcher often uses a lot of interpretation of the data to lift the data to a higher level of abstraction; yet direct quotes from the learners are presented so that the reader can judge the fairness and honesty of the interpretations given by the researcher. These interpretations are often useful to the readers so that they do not have to sort through a morass of detail, but contain enough of the detail to get the flavor of the learner's experience.

Another source that learners use in identifying the processes they are experiencing is their previous training. For example, those who have been well trained in group process will often see their own learning processes only in terms of group process. Those who have been exposed to a strongly cognitive psychology background will see their learning processes in terms of cognitive processes and will be blind to other processes. The only way we can interpret our worlds is in terms of ideas that are familiar to us but sometimes we limit ourselves to the concepts we have been taught as the only legitimate ones. We have to find other concepts that we can consider legitimate. This is the task of learning to name our learning processes.

The final approach to the learners' identification of their own individual processes is what I have called an enlightened awareness of self. It is this approach to which I wish to give attention in this article because it is in this approach that the teacher or facilitator has a crucial influence in effecting learning how to learn. (Learning how to learn is a concept growing in

importance because of the work of Smith.)^{7,8}

I summarize these approaches in the following chart before moving on to further discussion of this final approach and to the issues involved in helping learners learn how to name the learning processes they are experiencing.

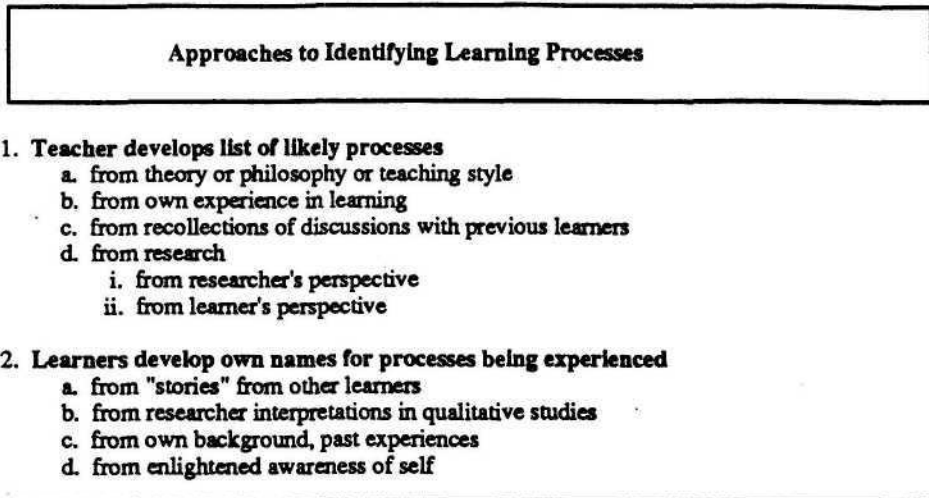


Figure 1. Summary of approaches to identifying learning processes.

Enlightened Self-Awareness

Since learners are unaccustomed to thinking in terms of their own learning processes, teachers or facilitators find it essential to help them develop their awareness of learning processes and of self-as-learner. One technique which I have already mentioned, which is useful for this purpose and which is non-threatening to learners, is the keeping of a **learning journal**. A second technique, also non-threatening, is for learners to join a mutually acceptable **learning partnership**.⁹ In a trusting relationship, the two or three partners can help each other reflect and find words to describe their experiences by talking with each other about them. The insights gained in this safe environment can then be taken to the larger learning environment.

Reflection time in classes is a good time for students with diverse backgrounds and experiences to discover the variety of ways their colleagues are experiencing the class and naming the processes they are experiencing. The teacher can help in this ambiguous task by serving as a **role model** of this way of thinking: revealing the learning processes he/she is experiencing as well. Learners tend to fall back on the safest thing they know to discuss: their emotional reactions to what has been happening in class. The teacher may need to help them translate this kind of discussion to the level of learning processes. The **translation process** is difficult for me as a teacher. It is made more palatable if the emotional reactions are accepted

since they are real and need to be dealt with before anything else can be discussed. They then provide a great opportunity for reflecting on how emotions, both negative and positive, can be used to aid in learning. This then opens the opportunity to reflect on the fact that we tend to think of our learning processes in terms of our previous training and experience. Learners can then in smaller groups help each other examine the relevance of this observation to them and can challenge each other, in a supportive way, to go beyond that past training and experience while still valuing it.

Stressing the importance of learning how to learn is crucial. Giving learners the time to reflect individually and to discuss in the class group the question of how these reflection periods are helping them learn how to learn will help learners at all levels of self-awareness develop an expanding understanding and comfort with the idea of learning processes.

Many adult learners come to learning settings with the socialized belief that they will be called on to use only their rational minds or intellect. My experience has been that when the expectation that they will use more of themselves in learning is explained, they are greatly relieved, even if a bit frightened of this strange new world that says, "You can use all of your learning capabilities: your emotions; your physical responses; your subconscious mind; your intuition; other altered states of consciousness; your relationships with friends and partners; and your spiritual capability as well as your rational mind."¹⁰ They need to be assured that they use all of these capabilities in everyday life, and that they can use them equally well in an adult education class. I find that these assurances, and assistance in planning how to use these capabilities, plus guided experiences in doing so, energize learners, and free them to begin naming their learning processes. One reason this happens is that they are given free reign to name these processes because there is not yet a prescribed list of processes that one should expect to experience in these areas. This surge of energy comes, I think, from what Hunt calls being your own best theorist, by starting with your own experience.¹¹

In a recent class, I was searching for a way to enable learners to think about and talk with the class group about the most important process each had experienced in the course. I settled on the idea of asking them to think of a metaphor that would represent this process to them. They were meeting in my home and were free to use anything in sight as a possible trigger for identifying a metaphor. I was quite impressed with the richness of metaphors and ideas that they shared with each other. I have found these metaphors appearing in term papers, a qualifying research paper, and in my own thinking since. Even three months later, I can remember the metaphor each person discussed and the processes these metaphors represented. And my memory of class conversations is normally not that reliable! Metaphors have the quality of making ideas memorable as well as communicating significant meanings succinctly. Although the metaphors were focussed on concrete objects (an outdoor thermometer, a large plastic butterfly, a bougainvillea

plant, the view out of my study window, etc.) the ideas associated with them were dynamic and "vibratory."

Teachers or Learners to Name the Processes?

When I first started working with the concept of learning processes, I felt it was my responsibility to name or to list the processes I thought learners would experience in my classes. I felt this was my responsibility because obviously no one else would know what I meant by the term and I had to create examples through my lists. I knew not everyone would experience the same thing, given a particular activity, but yet I used several of the processes from my list as a way of explaining at each class session what I had hoped would happen when I planned the agenda for that session.

The lists I created were based on solid ground: things previous individual learners had told me about their struggles and reactions to course events, class discussions and feedback, and findings from dissertation research I had supervised in the late '70s.

My thinking has evolved over the years through several stages, and I am now at the point of believing, as a result of continued work with learners, that it is more productive for the learners to name the processes they are experiencing or have experienced in a course than it was for me to name what I thought they would be experiencing.¹² I have set aside using the lists with which I started although they are available for learners who wish to study them. As a teacher I have responsibilities in helping learners learn how to name their processes, but I believe that the learners, left free to name their own learning processes, are more empowered by the ability to do so and by the results than they would be if trying to recognize in their experience something that I have named, using my words and my views of reality.

This observation has taken on greater force for me as a result of a learning journal I have been keeping of my efforts to learn to buy and to use a personal computer and the meaning of it for me. This is to be a starting point for a larger research project using a heuristic approach.¹³ In connection with this project I have been reading a book by Sherry Turkle, *The second self: Computers and the human spirit*.¹⁴ She reports the finding of three stages of learning in becoming part of the computer culture and how those stages are played out when the learner starts at different ages. It is a fascinating book and I recognize "her" stages in my own learning. However, I think there are additional stages and meanings in my own learning, and I would have felt "robbed" of some important insights if I had accepted only her results and had not bothered to keep my own journal and do my own analysis of my processes. Hence, I have another example of learning from the inside out instead of its opposite, from the outside in.¹⁵ I, like Hunt, am still advocating reading research done by others. Turkle's work is very affirming to me in that it tells me I am on the right track and that I can move ahead with confidence in describing my own processes, and furthermore, it is worth my while to do so.

Resistance Issues

Resistance issues relevant to learners naming their own learning processes include: naming versus labelling; valuing differences versus orderliness or sameness; inside out approach versus expert outsider; and naming versus experiencing. I will discuss each of these issues before listing examples of research that have been done, and discussing research that is needed.

As in the argument about all dichotomies, the question is: Will our approach be "either-or" or "both-and?" My philosophical position is that the "either-or" arguments crystallize the differences more dramatically; searching for the "both-and" resolution is more productive and creative. I shall try to start with one and end with the other.

naming versus labelling

Labelling persons usually means describing some characteristic of them that tends to "put them in a box" from which it is difficult to escape. The ongoing and intentional changes of the person are thus not easily acknowledged or recognized. People who are defensive about being labelled also tend to resist naming, without thinking of the difference. Their resistance is a useful reminder to us that the naming of processes should also be allowed to be a changing phenomenon. An experience that is named in one way at one time can well be understood differently later and the interpretation reconstructed as the person grows and develops. This form of freedom to change is to be granted to others if we wish to use it freely in ourselves.

valuing difference versus orderliness or sameness

Standing alone and saying, "I did not experience it that way, but experienced it differently," is risky to many learners. The tendency among learners is to feel, "There must be something wrong with me; I must be dumb that I didn't see what everyone else saw!" For many, there is comfort in sameness.

Teaching would be much easier if every learner we met experienced the same process from a given classroom activity; that orderliness would allow things to move along more quickly and smoothly. It would also be boring!

Valuing differences, on the other hand, not only allows but encourages each person to experience things differently. Discussions of these differences often lead learners to reconsider their position and to change. If the change is genuine, and just not following someone else because of dependence on them or being influenced by their power or other attractiveness, the changes are to be valued, and can be the start of significant learning and new self-awareness. Learners in my classes often report that they had had no idea that people could see things so differently; this is an enormous revelation to them. If they have been teachers, I wonder how they have been able to keep these differences submerged in their classes so that they have not been aware of differences among learners. I also wonder why their learners have been so

polite and docile that they have not been capable of surfacing their different points of view. These comments grow out of my assumption that differences are present not because the teacher has done something wrong, but because the teacher is doing a lot of things right! And these differences are not to be labelled "conflict" but sources of information from which learning can result if the differences are valued.

How can there be a "both-and" resolution of this dichotomy? The easiest answer is that we can make it "O.K." for learners to express sameness at one time and to express differences at another time. Important learning can come from either, whichever is genuine for the learner.

inside out approach versus expert outsider

Some learners like to be told at the beginning what the teacher thinks they are likely to experience, or to read what other learners who preceded them experienced. Other learners do not want this information ahead of having the experience. It does not have as much meaning until after they have had the experience. Being told what will happen to them robs them of the elation of discovery. This is just one form of the inside out versus expert outsider issue. It is an issue of **when** the learner wants to read relevant literature about learners' processes. Another issue is **whether** they want to read about the experience of others. I am willing to give a learner freedom to choose **when** they want to read about others, but I think those who choose not to tap this source of information are cheating themselves of important insights and inspiration for their self-understanding.

A critical factor in this issue is that the material made available for reading should be about the experience of others and not prescriptions of what somebody thinks learners should experience. We all resist being told what we should experience or feel. Those who write material based on qualitative research with one, ten, or two hundred people must be careful not to convey a prescriptive stance as though there were only one reality.¹⁶ Those who write about the learning process in adult education are immediately suspect to me, as are those who say true learning is "X" (one thing). I immediately begin a mental argument of, "What about 'Y' and 'Z'?" A subtle difference in wording can convey a **freedom to be** to the learner or a **prescription to be like me or as I want you to be**. (At this point I went back over this article to check my wording and to be sure I had not conveyed an attitude of prescriptiveness.) It is difficult not to be prescriptive when we feel strongly about something. We need to remember more change occurs in learners if they feel free to make up their own minds; resistances are immediately raised when we are told we should do something. At least this is true for those of us who like to operate on the inside-out principle.

The "both-and" resolution of this issue is captured in expecting people to read outsiders' reports as well as to name their own processes, using whatever is meaningful in their reading; but making certain that the material they have available to read is written in a sharing, not prescriptive way.

naming versus experiencing

A way of expressing this issue is the question of whether the need to name the processes being experienced gets in the way, or hinders "going with the flow" of experience. I do not know the answer to this question but I suspect that the timing of naming of processes is crucial here. Naming something too early can block its full development and potential or the full understanding of it. Not naming it at all lets it evaporate into the ether, unlikely to be recalled at a later time when it would be useful.

It is usual to have a reflection period at the end of each class session. These periods are very useful to get feedback about the session, but I am usually disappointed by the lack of ability of most students to name fully the processes they are experiencing. I have, too, often decided I have failed to make the concept clear to them. I am now developing the hunch that the timing immediately after one session in a series of sessions in the learning events is not the most useful for naming processes. We usually have far more productive discussions about learning processes at the final session of the course. And I know there are some students who take a year or more to come to some understanding of their processes and the meaning of the course to them. This is an area that has not yet been researched but should be. Students doing research through interviews with other students in classes interviewed the students once a week between class sessions and got much data but they were not asking students to name their processes; the interviewers gathered raw information and then took months to make sense of it and to interpret it in terms of processes experienced by the learners. I have always assumed it takes a long time to analyze qualitative data but only now have I seen the similarity with a learner taking time to make sense of his/her own experience. I remember so clearly the students who have come to me for guidance in writing their term papers at the end of a course. Several have been in a dilemma of not knowing how to write about their experience of the process of transformation because the transformation they were going through was not yet complete. The same kind of dilemma, presented by unfinished processes, exists for some, when students are asked to name their processes at the end of class sessions. I know in my journal-keeping about my learning, I am unable to see the pattern of a process until I have completed the process and have reflected back on the whole. This is especially true of transformations or transitions in meaning perspective.

An example would be that it is easy to identify relational learning, that is, the help from other people. But any generalizations about the whole pattern of what kind of help was useful and when will have to wait until the completion of the learning project. A patterning of relational learning would include such elements as, "Support was useful when I was exploring, but I needed critical evaluation as the project drew to a close."

It would therefore seem that some kinds of processes can be identified after a short time of experiencing but other kinds can only be identified much later. I try to make it clear to learners that they likely will have the same reaction and should not be discouraged when the processes they can name early on are

not the full story. I also try a mixture of timing patterns for reflections on learning processes. I hope that a year from now I will have clearer insights on this issue after experimenting, careful observation and discussion with my students. This is the best "both-and" resolution I can express at this point.

Research on Learning Processes

To give the reader some idea of the theses completed in our department that have dealt with the question of what it is like to be an adult learner, I will give a short list of examples. Many of these are ones I have been involved with, either as supervisor or committee member. The categories after which I list each are ones developed from a longer list of theses on learning processes. After presenting this list, some areas still needing research will be identified.

EXAMPLES OF THESES ON LEARNING PROCESSES DEPARTMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION, OISE

CATEGORY AND TITLE	RESEARCHER	DATE
Formal Course Learning Adult Learning in an Emergent Learning Group: Toward a Theory of Learning from the Learner's Perspective.	Marilyn Taylor	1979
Capability Related Process Images of Interdependence: Meaning and Movement in Teaching/Learning	Gwyn Griffith	1982
Reflection Teachers and Reflection: A Description and Analysis of the Reflective Process Which Teachers Use in Their Experiential Learning	Ann D'Andrea	1985
Other Processes Learning as a Process of Experiencing Difference	Thelma Barer-Stein	1985
Major Transformations The Experience of Doubt and Associated Learning in Religious Men	Ross Keane	1985
Health and Care Giving Taking Charge: Personal Responsibility for Health	Linda Pickard	1982
Aging and Retirement Major Issues of Older Adults Confronting Institutional Living: What to Keep and What to Give Away	Bernice Wilson	1983

Readers interested in receiving the longer list should write the author.

Figure 2. Theses on learning processes.

Needed Research

These theses deal with adult students in formal higher education programs, and in informal out-of-school programs. Some relate to the learning of adults not in any program but to those attempting to deal as effectively as they can with life circumstances. They and those in the longer list add much to our understanding but there are at least three areas of research still needed.

1. timing of naming of processes vs. experiencing

The need for systematic study of this issue was discussed earlier. It is a complex question when we consider that the optimum timing for naming different areas of process probably differs, and optimum timing for individuals probably differs too. Nor do we know what individual characteristics have an influence on the question of best timing. Optimum or best timing also needs some clarification. "Best for what?" will have to be answered. No doubt there are multiple answers.

2. naming the learning processes as a process

I have made a number of assertions about the value of this process which I believe to be true and have had affirmed by many learners. But they need to be checked out systematically in the experiences of more and varied learners. There are other questions to be explored, ones which I have not discussed earlier. Is there any relationship between the learning style and the ease with which people can learn to name learning processes or between the learning style and the perceived value of learning to name the learning processes? What is the relationship of learning to name one's learning processes with the goals of a learning program? With the level of self-awareness? With the educational level? With the degree of self-directedness encouraged in the learning environment? With readiness for self-direction? With control exercised by the teacher? With procedures used to help learners learn to name their processes? Many questions go unanswered and could be the base for a major research program.

3. learning processes and other variables

The long list of students who have done and are doing research in this area in our department has demonstrated a belief that understanding learning from the learner's perspective does have value. However, there are a number of gaps that need to be filled by additional research: gender differences; additional socio-economic levels; other educational levels; other occupational groups; people in special circumstances such as unemployment, physical disability, chronic health problems; learning in instrumental and dialogic domains as well as those in the emancipatory domain (Mezirow¹⁷ used these terms, citing Habermas); and other areas of process such as those dealing with spiritual capabilities, emotional capabilities, physical capabilities (stress and relaxation), subconscious capabilities (in addition to imagery, metaphors, and intuition). These are all areas needing additional work.

Educational procedures that could be used with categories of learners who have high proportions of learners with inhibitions on self-awareness, and public examination of personal processes, should be developed and documented. A synthesis of the theses dealing with learning from the learner's perspective is needed also. The book David Boud and I edited¹⁸ is only a tiny start in pulling together work that has been done in this area and does not pretend to be a synthesis.

Postscript

In trying to think how I would characterize this article for the abstract, I found myself going back to Schon's *The reflective practitioner*.¹⁹ I considered using his conceptions of what a reflective practitioner does to clarify what I have done in my teaching leading up to this article. But this article is essentially not about me but about adult learners and what they can do to make their learning more effective and to increase their power in learning how to learn. But some of Schon's ideas will still be useful. He talks about the competent client who is enabled to become an active participant in shared inquiry and is thus invited to join in a reflective contract with the practitioner (in our case, teacher). He contrasts the reflective contract with the traditional contract (figure 3).²⁰

Traditional Contract	Reflective Contract
I put myself into the professional's hands and in doing this, I gain a sense of security based on faith.	I join with the professional in making sense of my case, and in doing this I gain a sense of increased involvement and action.
I have the comfort of being in good hands. I need only comply with his advice and all will be well.	I can exercise some control over the situation. I am not wholly dependent on him; he is also dependent on information and action that only I can undertake.
I am pleased to be served by the best person available.	I am pleased to be able to test my judgments about his competence. I enjoy the excitement of discovery of his knowledge, about the phenomena of his practice, and about myself.

Figure 3. Schon's comparison of client (learner) contracts.

When learners first come to us they may not be expecting to enter into such a reflective contract but once they are invited they and we will be enriched as they "cultivate competence in reflective conversation" with us.²¹

Heider²² has another way of pointing out that learners and teachers should be working together in cooperative inquiry such as that required in understanding what it is like to be an adult learner. In discussing the philosophy of Tao and leadership, he says,

The group members need the leader for guidance and facilitation. The leader needs people to work with, people to serve. If both do not recognize the mutual need to love and respect one another, each misses the point.

They miss the creativity of the student-teacher polarity. They do not see how things happen.²³

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