

ADULT LEARNING IN AFRICA

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Serving as a Nazarene educator in Eurasia for two decades did not equip me to understand learners when I moved to Africa. The task I was given to design an outcomes-based curriculum to prepare students, most of whom were already pastors, was daunting. They were like the Apostle Peter and Apostle John, who knew the Savior but had little formal schooling. How could we lead these learners to understand the *stuff* of Nazarene 4 Cs competency statements? Stuff like the constructs of systematic theology, contexts of Church History, character issues in their pre-modern reality, ethical questions in their tribal society structures?

I needed help! So I dived into interviews with every church leader who spoke English or Portuguese, conducted surveys where surveys were never conducted before, stood with students before maps of their provinces which they had never seen before (their schools had no maps) studying exotic names of the rivers, peaks and languages of their home villages, of the locations where their churches were fast growing and multiplying, of the places that I would visit with them within the next few years.

I turned to missionary educators in Africa and from Africa and read the literature they had written. Within two years I had so much recorded research that my family advised, “You must turn this into a PhD!” I listened to their advice, enrolled as a distance student at the University of Pretoria, South Africa and learned there is a name for the process in which I was involved -- Participatory Action Research (PAR) – which is particularly utilized in Australia, New Zealand and Europe. So the next four years I continued learning about learning within teams I led of Mozambican educators and learners under the supervision of my doctorate advisor at U of Pretoria. By the time I had to publish it, it was over 400 pages so the U of P required that I cut out 70 pages which is the version on line at (my apologies for the form of Chapter 3): <http://upetd.up.ac.za/thesis/available/etd-11132006-180801/>

Our research questioned the efficacy of holistic learning strategies to promote the learning of developing leaders in the context of a developing country. It sought to understand whether, to what extent and how learning can be advanced by deliberately employing holistic learning strategies to narrow the gap between theory and practice, between left-brain and right-brain learning, and between cognition and emotion.

In relation to adult education, the study explored tri-dimensional (3-D) practice. This is the dynamic combination of *holistic learning strategies* in *cooperative learning groups* within *spiritual learning environments*. From a virgin research context extending throughout Mozambique, I gather empirical evidence which explores the efficacy of holistic learning strategies within 3-D practice with adult learners as administered by facilitators with minimal academic preparation.

The study also tested and refined the widely used model of Theological Education by Extension (TEE) by giving attention to problems cited by Kornfield (1976) and Gatimu, Gachegoh, Oyiengo, Kithome and Suwa (1997), and by applying our empirical research to issues cited by Brookfield (1995). Each of these issues will be briefly discussed below.

The Contextual Rationale: Shifts in the Global Church of the Nazarene

The title of the research [italics mine], “*The efficacy of holistic learning strategies in the development of church leaders in Mozambique: an action research approach*” implies the contextual rationale. Most of the learners are members of the Church of the Nazarene in Mozambique, and all of them are enrolled in the educational system of this international denomination that makes the Church of the Nazarene their over-arching theological and educational context, as well as one of their social contexts. The learners in the population are called church leaders in development because they are either in the process of being prepared for positions of leadership or they are already serving in positions for which they have had little or no training.

In the 1980s, the Church of the Nazarene began to face the reality that the dozens of Nazarene educational programs that were preparing pastors for life-long ministry were inadequate at several points. The first lack was quantitative; there were not enough programs to train pastors for the explosive growth taking place in some of the more remote and less developed regions of the globe (Walker 2000, RIIIE 2003). Other problems in these areas included too few trainers qualified to train pastors and little material developed for pastoral training. At the other extreme, head-knowledge seemed to have taken priority over heart- experience as pastors were succumbing to moral failures; others had excellent academic records but failed in ministerial skills like how to care for their parishioners or how to run a board meeting. Still others seemed to know enough and to know how but lacked an awareness or ability to read their context, so failed at relevance (Vail 2000, Esselstyn 2003). The Church of the Nazarene was not alone in recognizing shortcomings in theological education. Noelliste (1993:5) recognizes “the growing dissatisfaction being voiced in many circles regarding much of what theological education does...[it] is being assailed for a plethora of faults: lack of purpose, the disparateness and inadequacy of its content, disconnectedness with the community of faith, insensitive policies, ineffective teaching methods, and many others. From Germany, another Evangelical educator notes similar problems (Schirmacher 1999:4).

Systemic changes were needed in the Church of the Nazarene to prepare a greater number of pastors worldwide to staff the hundreds of new churches and to embrace diversity more equitably. Training programs for trainers and learners needed to be developed which would extend pastoral preparation to populations which had been deprived of formal education and who did not speak a major world language. Overall, pastoral training programs needed to facilitate the spiritual formation of the ministerial candidates as well as their knowledge and know-how.

On the global level, Nazarenes voted in 1997 at the twenty-fourth General Assembly to shift the hundreds of its pastoral training programs in the world to Outcomes Based Education. The exit outcomes of these programs described what the ideal Nazarene pastor would KNOW, would BE and would DO. In order for Nazarene educators around the world to have a guide to help contextualize the programme outcomes to fit the diverse constituencies, committees created a tool called the International Sourcebook for Ministerial Development (Bowling 1997, Esselstyn 1999).

Nazarene educators around the world are now in the process of developing new curricula. With Nazarenes in more than 150 world areas, publishing holiness literature in 97 languages, the task of restructuring curriculum is a formidable one. There are 56 Nazarene educational institutions

around the world in forty different countries in which 497,597 learners reported in 2006 (Stone 2006).

Since 2000, more than 400 pastors have been trained to train others to pastor in Mozambique by me and other members of the several PAR teams I have led. These pastor trainers are called “monitors” and are currently teaching 1,272 Nazarene learners in 97 local churches which serve as educational centres of the extension system called “Nazarene Bible Institute of Lusophone Africa” (IBNAL).

Our team’s normal access to the larger student population is through these monitors who speak the maternal languages of the leaders. The monitors, with whom we have established rapport through their period of training, have the linguistic and functional capabilities to extend our research deep and repeatedly into rural pockets of the country. Through these monitors, we are discovering more about how learning takes place with adults in contexts like those in rural settings in Mozambique.

The “classroom situations” of these Nazarene learners in Mozambique are surely some of the most unique imaginable. Although we PAR team members usually work with the monitors, we occasionally test material directly among these learners. In 2001, I field-tested a newly designed course with a group of 70 adults in the Nampula province. In a mud-brick little church with four holes for windows the learners sat hour after hour on straw mats on the mud-packed floor. Most of them were already serving as pastors; some of them were barefoot and all of them seemed to be hungry – hungry to learn! They said they yearned to be pastors who are trained for what they are doing. Their physical setting left everything to be desired but their exemplary motivation to learn keeps those of us on the PAR teams “laying down track before their train” so they may arrive at their destination.

At the outset of this research, some aspects of this learner population were known, others presumed:

- The groups of learners that study together have divergent academic histories; some of them have little formal schooling, others have considerable, this diversity is likely representative of most of the learning groups.
- The majority of the learners presumably have a low level of schooling, are at least 15 years old with the majority being mature adult learners, older than 15, are already serving as pastors.
- The aspect presumed to be common to all of the learners is their motivation to spiritual values, specifically to Christian values.

Besides informing Nazarene educators within the Nazarene educators outside of Mozambique, this PAR project also informs those within the system by enabling the facilitators and the learners to share experiences across geographic divides on the national level. The learners and trainers in the Nazarene Bible Institute of Lusophone Africa (IBNAL) are enabled by the results of this study to better understand how their own learning takes place encouraging them to exercise their service to God with greater integrity and competency to all the people of their communities and their parishes.

The Pragmatic Rationale

The second rationale is pragmatic –to test and refine the model of Theological Education by

Extension, the “TEE Model”. This informal system of training Christian leaders has had wide international application on other continents and across Africa, including in Mozambique. At an All-Africa Conference of Theological Educators in 1990, a list of weaknesses in the TEE model, compiled by Kornfield in 1976, was presented for discussion. The weaknesses included several related to the facilitators being sent out from a residence institution to outlying extension centres. My PAR research attempts to refine the TEE model by taking into account these recognized weaknesses and modifying the flexible parts of the model to improve it. Besides the weaknesses compiled by Kornfield, another problem with TEE programs, cited by Gatimu et al (1997:14), is the lack of academic recognition outside the TEE programme. This aspect is also taken into account in this study.

I acknowledge at the outset of this research a third and broader-based limitation described by Mkabela and Luthuli (1997:54): “language has played a primary role in hampering African education...this calls for a search for alternatives to improve the situation and to allow mother-tongue instruction to come to the fore”. Within the model the PAR team members implement to observe holistic learning strategies in this research, the facilitation of learning happens in the mother-tongues of the adult learners of my population, and this receives deliberate and repeated attention.

The Scholarly Rationale

The third rationale is scholarly, seeking to contribute a different and valid perspective on adult learning. Brookfield, a renowned specialist in adult learning, suggests ten issues which need to be addressed if research on adult learning is “to have a greater influence on how the education and training of adults is conducted”. My research is conducted to add knowledge to five of the areas that Brookfield (1995:7-8) identifies:

- Other cultural perspectives to break the Eurocentric and North American dominance in research in adult learning;
- Solidify qualitative studies by means of survey questionnaires or experimental designs;
- Work on spiritual and significant personal learning;
- Understanding adult learning as a socially embedded and socially constructed phenomenon, and
- Attention to the interaction between emotion and cognition in adult learning.

Brookfield argues that the attempt to construct an “exclusive theory of adult learning – one that is distinguished wholly by its standing in contradiction to what we know about learning at other stages in the lifespan – is a grave error”. He proposes that variables other than chronological age may be more significant in explaining how learning occurs. He cites (1995:1) “culture, ethnicity, personality and political ethos” as potential variables of significance, but there may be others.

Therefore, the enquiry constructed across the experience of this project seeks to contribute knowledge on the scholarly exploration about how adult learning takes place. If this research shows that holistic learning strategies do enhance learning, including the achievement of complex outcomes like attitudes and character traits, then the strategies which are verified as effective will be of interest to many educators, particularly of adult learners, and to other educators in the Church of the Nazarene and other similar contexts. The results of this research

will also interest educational providers and trainers of adults who have minimal formal schooling, like users of the TEE model who will also be interested in the refinement of the widely-used model.

Literature Review

The development of leaders has been the subject of centuries of research, debate and modeling. The Gospel writers and the writings St. Paul are replete with educational terms like “learning”, “knowing”, “teaching”, “thoughts”, “imitation”, and so on. Whole orders, movements and mission bands have been spawned to evangelize and teach. Several of these developed and perfected systems of learning within groups of adult learners in diverse groups and present aspects quite relevant to the context of this project: John Wesley created “societies” and “bands” within the Anglican Church which impacted all of England and generated the Methodist Church (Snyder 1980, Kivett 1995); Freire within Brazilian, then other systems of public education, set up “cultural communities” of “dialogical education” based on the then-current model of Catholic Church “Christian Communities” (Taylor 1993); Frank Laubach in the Philippines, then throughout Asia, then Angola, “devised ‘picture-word-syllable’ correlations that could teach illiterate peoples to read” (Foster 1998:47); and those of the Theological Education by Extension (TEE) movement, first in Central America, then in Africa, wrote and still write programmed student texts which are the “teachers” and train trainers to be facilitators of the learning process (Winter 1969, Thorpton 1975).

Centuries of reflection on the origin, nature, control, stimulation and organization of humankind’s capacity to think has generated whole disciplines of commentary as well as whole libraries of research and speculation. Classical thinkers renowned for their mental disciplines and capacity to inspire others in their thought systems will be considered in this study. Since 1533, the “spiritual exercises” of St. Ignatius of Loyola have been used to deepen spirituality by employing contemplation of spiritual “mysteries” using a collection of directed and repeated mental exercises. The 20th century also produced champion practitioners of mental devices which contributed to their character including the victims of undeserved solitary confinement, Richard Wurmbrant (1982) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1953), describe in their autobiographies the secrets to maintaining mental and spiritual well being in spite of dire circumstances. Paulo Freire’s “Método” (method of using ten carefully compiled drawings to encourage analytical dialogue) guides pre-literates to speak their world as a rehearsal to literacy (Taylor 1993).

My literature review also includes forays into learning strategies which involve learning in various formats of enactment and social problem solving: scenarios, role-playing, representation, dramatic readings, mock trials, etc. Through my literature study I also discovered that learning strategies which are practiced by those involved in adult learning (Brookfield 1986, 1987, 1988, 1995, 1998, 2004, Cranton 1992, Gravett 2005), transformational learning (Payette 2002, Mezirow 1999, O’Sullivan 1999), understanding music in the brain (Jourdain 1997, Storr 1992) balanced learning, authentic cooperative learning (Gatimu 1997, Holland 1975, Winter 1969), cogmotics (Copley 2000), whole-brain learning (Herrmann 1994, De Boer & Steyn & du Toit 2001), brain-based learning (Caine & Caine 1991, Jensen 1994, 1997, 1998, Sprenger 1999) are among those effective for the learner population of my study.

However, the review of literature in books, learned journals, and the internet, did not lead me to authentic knowledge about my learners in their contexts. The adult learners of Mozambique, especially those in the remote, rural settings, have had scarce, if any, attention by researchers to

their educational needs. The project set up and assessed a holistic system of learning in which facilitators are trained and supported to use holistic learning strategies in cooperative groups within spiritual learning environments, i.e. to utilize 3-D practice for adult learning.

The term “learning strategies” as opposed to “teaching strategies” focuses on the learning that is targeted to take place in the minds of the learners rather than the activities engaged in by the teachers. The “teachers”, more appropriately called “facilitators of learning” or “monitors”, contribute actively to the learning taking place within their learning setting by making multiple, tactical choices which affect aspects of the learning environment in which they are conducting learning encounters. Facilitators make decisions regarding aspects of the physical setting which are within their control, about their relationships to the learners and other non-physical aspects of the learning setting, about the planning of series of “learning strategies” which enhance the possibility of each learner to construct within her or his personhood and within the set of learners the knowledge, attitudes, skills and character traits defined and targeted as intended learning outcomes.

“Learning strategies” are considered “holistic” when they take into account that the learner who is benefiting by the “learning” is not considered only in terms of the cognitive increase but as a person who has spiritual dimensions and is learning within a social context. Holistic learning strategies, therefore, include social and spiritual learning as well as whole-brain learning.

“Whole-brain learning” refers to

learning which activates the limbic brain as well as the cerebrum and the right hemisphere as well as the left hemisphere.

Several holistic learning theories and “whole-brain” models were explored but I use the metaphoric four-quadrant model of Herrmann (1994) more often than the others because it is graphic and made sense to the facilitators I was training. Yet all of the theories and models investigated in the literature contributed to the knowledge about holistic learning strategies which has been constructed during this study.

Within models of adult learning considered to be successful, “learning strategies” utilized which took into account spiritual and social learning were those of Moses, the Synagogue, Jesus Christ, the Apostles, St. Augustine, Martin Luther, St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Wesleys, Freire, Laubach, and the educators who created and developed “Theological Education by Extension” (TEE).

Within these models 31 learning strategies were identified as potentials for use by the facilitators. The list below displays these learning strategies including four different kinds of discussions. The last eight which are bolded plus “discussions of several kinds” constitute the “holistic learning strategies”, one of the three dimensions of 3-D practice which includes

- Affection of all four quadrants of the brain
- Social interaction the social sub-selves of the learner
- Spiritual context and connection.

The listing is organized by the brain quadrant of the four-quadrant model, with the main types of activity which Herrmann (1994) attributes to the quadrant:

Quadrant A (left cerebral): CODING / DECODING ACTIVITIES:

1. actively and independently assessing Bible content
2. hearing the Bible and text material read and explained
3. memorizing Bible content
4. reading the programmed Text Africa books
5. regular group discussions based on main ideas (informational)

Quadrant B (left limbic): ORGANISING / ORDERING / REORDERING ACTIVITIES:

6. taking of written exams
7. answering questions in writing in the Text Africa books
8. attending class at least 67% of the time
9. discussions based on reasoning questions

Quadrant C (right limbic): REFLECTING / ORAL-SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

10. inviting God to intervene (prayer)
11. encouraging and helping colleagues
12. including peer tutoring in second-chance occasions
13. reflection using several applications
14. regular singing of songs
15. choral reciting of truths
16. working on projects together to buy books
17. discussions based on application questions

Quadrant D (right cerebral): SYNTHESISING / GRAPHIC INTERPRETING ACTIVITIES:

18. icon or visual clue interpretation
19. key words as tags, labels
20. pictures, maps, graphs
21. discussions based on key words
22. identifying heroes
23. appropriately applying Bible content to life scenarios

FOUR QUADRANT OR WHOLE-BRAIN ACTIVITIES

24. rehearsing integrity: hero modelling / role-modelling /
25. role-taking/ self-sacrifice
26. team work: team building work projects /
27. pair or trio groupings /peer tutoring
28. classical spiritual disciplines
29. singing for learning
30. cooperative learning groups
31. praxis

While the findings in the empirical study are inferential evidence, not the result of direct measurement, they consist of carefully tabulating perceptions of the research population and reporting textual data gathered from many and varied sources, analyzing discourse texts, coding themes and interpreting recurrent themes and disconfirming evidence.

The reliability of the evidence is also demonstrated by the situation in 2012 in Mozambique. Hundreds of pastors, Nazarene and other Evangelicals, who started to learn to be pastors via this system of 3-D practice are continuing to learn this way. Several are now ordained. Several are now district leaders and superintendents. Most have become pastors who facilitate learning for other pastors.

I express the hope that the Mozambicans themselves, those participating with me in this PAR project and others will respond to the challenge to reclaim/affirm their indigenous story. They are equipped to accurately identify, give voice and share the vision for the depth of understanding concerning learning and identity in their maternal cultures and their maternal languages that could be brought to the fore by continuing to probe, to research and to write for the rest of the world to appreciate.

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