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Bamberg donates time:
Andragogues develop a city

Abstract:

In this paper a project of cultural learning in a community in Germany is described: Students of andragogy organized a public exchange of “gifts” without material value; the idea was that the donator offered to share two to three hours of the personal life in a joint activity. About 200 people including local respected authorities participated. The event on the market-place before Christmas became a public festival; the idea was widely welcomed with joy. The regional press reported; many gift-encounters took place. A challenging discussion took place about the relationship to adult education and andragogy.

Theoretical Context

(Adult) Education always is embedded into a socio-historic context, fulfilling the needs of the respective society and individuals. The focus of interest changes with the changing of society. Different functions, orientations, “roots” of the idea of adult education become visible in this historical process:

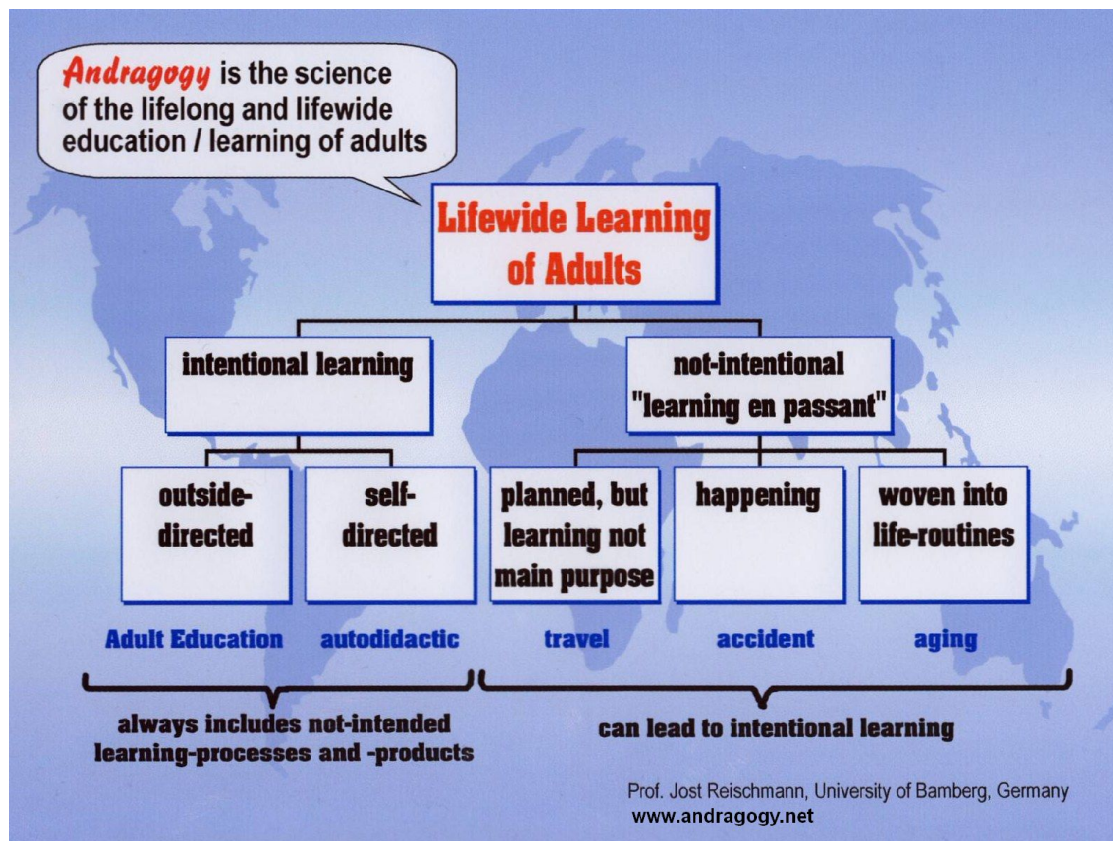
- Today the “*transmission perspective*” (Pratt) seems predominant: Adult education is seen as a tool for effective training, often related to company training, needing to be effective, to enable transfer and application.
- Looking back not much more than one decade the idea of *social justice and reform, of empowerment and emancipation* (i.e. Freire) was the predominant understanding of adult education.

- Some years before “becoming a person” (Rogers), the development of the “*fully functioning*”, *holistic individual* with all his “intellectualia, sensualia, spiritualia” (Comenius) was in the centre.
- *Compensatory education* - giving a second chance to learners that missed a first chance - is another root we can find in the historic look-back.
- In many historic contexts education for *building community*, society, and “parish” can be found, supplying a unifying idea helping individuals to become part of a wider social body with solidarity, care-taking, and identity.

More such basic roots could be named, but this discussion should not take place here. What this listing of roots and dominances should make aware:

- Asking for the “only right and legitimate adult education” would be ahistoric: Different orientations, “roots” seem to be predominant for a while, and then are replaced through another new or old orientation. Andragogy (Reischmann 2005b) as the scholarly approach to adult education can identify and describe these orientations, can compare them, and describe their strengths and weaknesses - and can take care that they are not forgotten when new mainstreams become predominant and seem to “take over” the whole understanding of adult education.
- “Predominance” does not mean that the other orientations disappear. In the variety of fields where the education of adults happens, many parallel streams flow besides and across the mainstream. Even in times where mainstreams become overwhelming, claiming to be the only “right” adult education, andragogy must safeguard the wealth of the historical memory of the subject. This allows it to have a wide(r) variety of understanding and intervention strategies for the various fields of the education of adults.

In the historic and systematic memory of andragogy many formats for the education of adults are stored. Besides the intentional learning in adult education institutions or in autodidactic learning projects adults learn in various partly-intentional or non-intentional situations (“learning en passant”). Andragogy takes all these formats into consideration, formal or informal, traditional or non-traditional.



This theoretical context became the framework for a practical project in an innovative format. Theory and practice flows together in this project, enriching both. This “flowing together” can be seen as an example for the enriching and necessary relationship between theory and practice in andragogy.

The project “Bamberg donates time”

Bamberg - and Christmas - is the important context: Bamberg is a little city in Germany - 80.000 inhabitants, old, with rich history, what you can see in each building, the cathedral, and the city-hall in the middle of the river. We have an arch-bishop, and city-officials that are very visible. The more old-fashioned citizens and the sometimes a bit crazy university people, tourists from Japan and the neighboring cities give a vivid mixture. And Christmas is a very special time with illumination, concerts, Christmas-market, hot spiced wine and Bamberg sausages smelling through the narrow streets ...

The Scandinavians know the custom of “Julklap”: In school-classes, societies, workplaces people give a gift into a basket and on a certain day all meet and each takes a gift out of the basket - each is giver and taker at the same time. A student of mine came up to me and said: Why don't we organize Julklap for the city? I said: What has that to do with adult education?

I will leave you for a while with this question, while describing, what happened.

A team of about one dozen students of andragogy at Bamberg University planned the project “Bamberg donates time” - a mutual donation circle for the “whole city”: Citizens were asked to offer a “gift” to share with somebody else. An important step was to decide what the gifts should be. The specific idea of this project was that these gifts should have no material value; the idea was to share two to three hours of the personal life in an activity the donator offered to share: showing how to prepare a specialty meal, playing together with a model railroad, inviting to harvest cherries in the garden. “Sharing time” and “opening doors and hearts” were the images we used.

Two steps became the key for success of the planning:

- At first a number of the leading people in the city were asked for their donation and participation. And without hesitation, the arch-bishop, the city mayor, the county mayor, the general of the US-base agreed to participate.
- Then the local newspaper was contacted for support. They with great engagement picked up the idea, and invited publicly to join “Bamberg schenkt Zeit” - “Bamberg donates time”. They introduced the project with a half-page article, and more: Twice a week they published a list with the people that had offered gifts, and the gifts they wanted to donate. And starting with the town mayor, the arch-bishop ... (including interviews) was a thrilling start for the newspaper-journalists as well as the newspaper-readers.

Sunday afternoon two weeks before Christmas on the Christmas market below the decorated Christmas tree the exchange of partners and gifts took place in form of a lottery. More than 200 people – including local and society representatives, hobby specialists, and “normal” families - offered gifts for exchange. The Arch-bishop offered his gift (an invitation to his house for dinner, afterwards a visit to the Bamberg symphonic orchestra, sitting with him in the first row). And then he grabbed in the big sack and pulled out a name. The person was called up, came forward to the podium, and offered him one violin-lesson with the promise, that he will afterwards be able to play a Christmas carol on the violin. The city mayor invited his “lottery match” to a guided tour through rooms in the city castle which are not open for the public, and was invited to a meal with north German cooking in the home of the donator. The representative of the foreign citizens invited to a Greek festival and was invited to cherry-picking and making marmalade. The county major invited to a hike a local castle and was invited to a canoe-tour through the local river; the general major of the US-community invited to a military ceremony and was invited to the local basketball team.



The radio station interviewing the “celebrities” (city mayor, county major, representative of the foreign citizens, bank director, General Major of the US-community, representative of the arch-bishop ...) about their gift on the market place.

There was a lot of laughter in the two hours of this lottery. People were talking to people, commenting on the matches, Gradpa Rudi with his barrel-organ played Christmas tunes, and many of the matching partners could be seen afterwards on the Christmas market enjoying sweets, hot maroons, and mulled wine.

Local and regional media reported. In the next months the newspaper repeatedly showed pictures of activities caused by “Bamberg donates time”. This brought sustainability to the “meeting and sharing” idea of the project. A rough observation revealed that about half of the “matches” met twice, exchanging both gifts, one quarter met once, one quarter never met. Those who met mostly reported “having fun together”, but also more reduced “it was ok”. No real negative events were reported.

This small project turned out more successful and joyful than expected. And it might provoke the question: Should we copy this idea for our community / university / society?

But in spite of the convincing practical idea the question remains: Is that adult education?

The andragogical background

The question “Is that adult education?” refers back to ones individual understanding of “adult education”. This individual understanding is embedded in the socio-historic context, as reflected at the beginning of this paper.

If somebody defines adult education primarily by the existence of teachers, curricula, school-buildings, and/or predefined outcomes, then this project confuses and challenges this understanding. And this may be **the first and main value of this project**: It challenge to recheck thinking, it forces to clarify understanding. In professional language: It opens the **way out of the hermeneutic circle**. So the first insight is (either banal or surprising): Adult education has beyond the mainstream-face many genuine and helpful faces. Combined with the theoretical-historic approach, offered by andragogy, this wider perception helps to overcome the narrowed view of mainstream-thinking and to perceive the wider field of “lifewide adult education”. This opens alternatives for flexible thinking and innovative practice. In the interaction between action and reflection in a project as described andragogical professionalism can be developed, applied, and proofed.

In addition to this more theoretical value “Bamberg donates time” confirms clearly a number of practical educational effects. A first group of effects can be seen in the **individual learning-experience** in the project:

- Most gifts offered learning chances on a content level (“learning star constellations”, “seeing the city with the eyes of an architect”).
- All gifts brought insights on a person-to-person-level (sharing the personal time and “lifeworld” of others) and offered chances of “learning en passant” (Reischmann 1996).
- With the question “What would I donate?” many people started thinking in a loving way about others and themselves: learning solidarity (Klafki).

Above this individual development a second group of effects can be identified leading to “**building community**”: This project offered the chance to think about sharing and meeting and supported a culture of solidarity and interchange of people in the community. What happened was a “city-culture in

smiling” with the message: “So we want our city to be!” and “Lets do it together in this city”. For his message it was important that prominent citizens participated. (*Organizational learning and development, learning organization, society building*).

And a third group of effects focussed on **andragogical professionalism**: The public should learn the variety of competences andragogues have, what andragogues are good for: Not only teaching knowledge, but also to develop solidarity, living together, building a culture. And of course the students that organized the project could collect experiences in professional project management.

Adult Education in this project is understood not as transmission of knowledge, but as a gift and chance to persons and communities to become better. That makes it a good occasion to rethink what “education” means, and what the task of andragogues is.

When we see and accept the diversity of learning and the diversity of dealing with learning, when we integrate the specific strengths in the “division of labor” in this field - practitioners, scholars, organizers, learners, then we will more appropriate and more creative help supporting adult learning and adult learners, and help “the world” to become a better place to live in.

When andragogy safeguards the wealth of the historical memory, this opens - like in the described project - a wider understanding (theory) and more adequate intervention strategies (practice). Theory is not only theoretical, but can be - as seen in “Bamberg donates time” - very practical.

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