

Persons in Relation

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I have 10 minutes to say 3 things about how Colin's latest collection of works should act as a timely reminder to adult and community educators.

Happiness and freedom

There has been a lot of interest lately in the health of our inner being - in our happiness and well-being – and, as Ian Martin reminds us, when governments take a sudden interest in something, our sceptical senses should be alerted.

Happiness has been a bit of a theme lately as has been 'keep calm and carry on'. I want to print some T-Shirts that say Remain Angry and Carry-On (as in 'What's all that carry-on?'). We're all in this together! With the small proviso that if you have an off-shore account that pays you monthly via a tax free allowance you're not really in it at all!

Roger Scruton, the conservative philosopher reminds us that happiness is at the heart of conservative values and thinking. He holds that individual happiness is to be valued over the achievement of collective rights. For him, the sustained influence of established institutions of society leads to a sense of stability which, in turn, produces a sense of personal security and certainty that holds the promise of a deeper sense of personal contentment. In his opinion, conservatism favours 'a quiet but pragmatic politics whose principal concern is to maintain the ship of state afloat on the sea of destiny' (Scruton, 1989: 8) Historically, Scruton believes, the liberal propensity to challenge the authority of established institutions produces mistrust, instability and insecurity. Accordingly, liberal versions of freedom are seen as 'abstract' and 'tend to corrupt, under the impact of human resentment, into the antinomian willfulness of revolution' (1989: 9). So, given that Roger points the way to happiness and contentment, perhaps we should turn our attention to freedom and willfulness!

Colin Kirkwood's writing on the 'persons in relation perspective' reminds us that the outcome of dialogue is the development of willfulness. In this conservative turn to the inner-self, Colin's work reminds us that we should not abandon the territory of the inner-psyche but, rather, renew our interest in it as adult and community educators.

His work on MacMurray reminds us of the importance of the emotions and their relation to motivation. As MacMurray would have it 'Emotion stands directly behind activity determining its substance and direction' (MacMurray cited in Kirkwood, 2012:9). This, in turn, might help us recall the important connection that adult and community education has placed on the relationship between cognitive and affective learning. There is however an oft-forgotten (or perhaps ignored?) element of human learning, which has to do with the conative – or learning to act. Conative learning has to do with the development of will. It turns the inner affect of cognitive learning outward. It is how we develop willfulness. Cognitive, affective and conative learning. This tripartite confluence of learning lies at the theory/practice nexus of Praxis; reflection and action together forming will.

Fromm reminds us that it is the 'Fear of Freedom' which lies at the heart of what Freire called the 'Culture of Silence' - the silencing of the will to be free through the creation of fear. For all adult and community educators, Colin's timely reminder is that we ought to be concerned with *all* forms of learning: cognitive, affective and conative.

All living is meeting

Our second timely reminder has to do with the centrality of dialogue to the practice of adult and community education.

I'm constantly addressed by the simplicity and complexity of Buber's affirmation that 'all living is meeting'. The affirmation is in the concept that we are all social beings and that we desire communion: the self-realisation of persons in relation. As we learn from Colin's book, Buber was a contemporary of Macmurray's and admired his work.

Reading Colin's work reminded me of the importance of creating opportunities for communion in adult education. Communion is used to indicate the coming together of persons beyond the mere act of meeting. It has to do with a more profound human need to share our individual understandings of experience with others. Mezirow (2000) reminds us why the process is so important, as the alternative is the escape from freedom.

A defining condition of being human is our urgent need to understand the meaning of our experience, to integrate it with what we know to avoid the threat of chaos. If we are unable to understand, we often turn to tradition, thoughtlessly seize explanations by authority figures, or resort to various psychological mechanisms, such as projection and rationalisation, to create imaginary meanings. (Mezirow, 2000: 6)

We may experience the events of our lives as individuals but it is only in the

meeting of consciousness' that we truly come alive. For Gadamer it is the coming together of 'Horizons of Understanding' and in these encounters of horizons we learn new ways of viewing our own horizons.

Both Colin and MacMurray remind us that, as Adult and Community Educators our practice, if it is to do with human development, should be about the meeting, the structuring of encounters, the bringing together of horizons, where personal experience is exposed to 'cognitive dissonance', and the emotional turmoil of doubt, betrayal and uncertainty into new forms of wilfulness.

So, the second timely reminder is that in the age of pre-ordained learning outcomes, pre-set learning profiles and competence measurement frameworks we also require the spontaneity to refuse, as Ira Shor puts it, 'to help students fit quietly into the way things are'. In our duty of care and our professional integrity we should offer the possibility of living through meeting.

Process, content and relevance

The third and final timely reminder is that Colin's latest contribution to Scottish society couldn't have come at a more timely moment. If ever there were a historical moment to re-assert the need for dialogue – our time is it. Scottish society finds itself in the midst of an on-going political conjuncture which has its routes in a more organic movement for change. I think that arguably it is currently in one of its most profound periods of flux. As someone once said no one knows what the flux is going on!

The persistent contradictions at the heart of the Scottish condition – poverty, ill-health, violence, homelessness, sectarianism – have failed to be adequately addressed through the devolution of power from the metropolitan centre. More levers are demanded to tackle these contradictions seriously and the debate is on to determine what these levers should be and who should have their hands on them.

The inane name-calling and the pettiness of some political exchanges debase the importance of the historical moment; for instance to reduce the argument to whether or not we will all be £500 better off after independence is profoundly insulting.

The dialogue between independence and inter-dependence deserves a better response. Wouldn't it be a pity if we, as adult and community educators, missed the opportunity to show the potential of dialogical action to engage people in an exploration of the contradictory relationship between mutuality

and exclusivity?

Thanks Colin for these timely reminders: that freedom lies in the development of willfulness; that adult educators should continue to promote living through meeting; and that we need dialogical action to help us engage as people in the historical debate surrounding Scotland's future.

References

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