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Centre for Heutagogical Learning - a proposal to establish a Subversity - Future Uni as a Bush Mechanics Institute

BMARP Auxiliary 4: Future Uni through establishing an Artificer Learning Centre/Bush Mechanics Institute

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Introducing Subversity

In 1998-9 I was involved with group in rural Australia seeking to develop an 'off-grid' future-university, realising that many people today see the 'off-grid' nature of much of our future. In short if there is to be a future for the university, one that aids the planet then, it certainly won't be the 'official one'. We saw our market as backpackers and 'coming-of-age' youth moving off intentional communities. In fact there are around 200 such intentional communities in the region (Northern New South Wales) with an estimated 20,000 people and 6,500 youth, several hundred of which leave the communities each year. Today most youth leave the communities in their late teens.

The concept is called a 'subversity' and recognises that most cutting edge research, and all social innovation, is now done outside universities, which have tended to degenerate to 'credentialling the status quo'. Accreditation was deliberately not sought and workshops were to use theatre and bush settings sprinkled with Socratic dialogue and theatre (yes a 'page on stage' alternative to 'sage on stage' or more frequently a 'sage on page' type lecturing) and web based non-personal 'hyper-learning' yes there are alternatives that embrace the original Enlightenment vision of rationality which included theatre, imagination, and introspection as well as empiricism and active practical wisdom.

This is not new-age gabfest rather it is aimed at tapping into the increasing flow of people who recognise that learning is not only about 'things' or 'how to fit in'. Today learning is also about four additional issues; activism to change the system, artifice knowledge linking inner and outer knowledges, cultural empowerment. All of these then can all be bound together with a 'Global Citizens Charter' which in turn is embedded in 'planetary consciousnesses'. Here we combine the following in a learning living experience.

Subversity's pedagogy - Action Learning Circles

LC's are designed to help people learn from each other, using materials provided in the kit (session guidelines and other resources) and material gathered from elsewhere as a framework. Generally LC's have up to 15 members one of whom is a facilitator.

Guiding the meeting usually changes from week to week and is often undertaken by the person particularly interested in the topic at hand. Meetings are usually in someone's home and are quite informal even being in the kitchen. Other names for learning circles are kitchen cabinet or study club.

Learning Circles can contribute to our democracy and our deliberations.

Remember always this learning circle material is not a text or a curriculum only a guide.

Learning circles work a bit like a round table though you will usually be in a round circle with out the table. In the mythic 'round table' King Arthur had a table built round so no knight or he would be at the head of the table. Next he varied where knights and he sat.

Learning Circle members are good listeners and help others express their ideas by being active listeners i.e. showing genuine interest when someone else is talking. Everyone gets a chance to have his or her 'two bobs worth'. Disagreement over an issue is fine, however don't make disagreements personal. Be hard on the subject, not the person.

Forming an Action Learning Circle for 'Bush Mechanicing'

Two basic assumptions underpinning the learning circle idea are that individuals have an innate desire to learn and that active participation promotes this learning. The work of the learning circle emanates from the conditions and circumstances of the lives of the participants, and reward for the m is the experience of a greater understanding of themselves and their world together with the application of this understanding for the improvement and enrichment of their indeed our everyday lives. Learning takes place because knowledge acquired corresponds to personal needs and applies to everyday live. In other worlds, life and learning belong together.

The Action Learning Circle (ALC) emphasises group learning and group self-studies based on the belief that knowledge and understandings develop through an interchange between individuals within the group. The participants influence the selection of the content of the studies, and share responsibility of ensuring the meaningfulness of the studies. Through conversation, dialogue and exchange of information in a relaxed and informal manner within the learning circle member assists each other acquire knowledge and develop understandings.

Accordingly, everyone needs to make an active contribution to the work of the learning circle. In this way all members are teachers and students at the same time. Each member is responsible for the other members as well as for him or her self. Co-operation, together with democratic atmosphere facilitates dialogue. Each person feels equal to all other members of the circle and each person participates on equal footing. This includes facilitator who functions as a guide and assists members by providing information, and indicating ways of proceeding and ensuring participation of all members in the action learning process.

As already pointed out, a feature of the learning circle is the responsibility on the part of the members of the design and content of the learning program, which in this instance is aimed at achieving increased local efficacy in for instance Community Economic Development. Topics could be drawn from member's immediate experience, a key community question, a specific bushy topic etc.

Some learning circles follow a previously developed plan of studies and questions, while others draw up their own program more in keeping with their changing needs and

interests. The success of the learning circle depends on its members bringing knowledge and experiences to the circle, and the sharing and processing of this information at the meetings. The existing knowledge and experience may be supplemented by learning materials, which provide information that can be read individually between sessions and can be discussed during sessions.

These learning materials may contain set projects, which encourage individual members to refer to the contents to their own problems and situations, and to proceed to other sources of information. The materials are designed on the assumption that adults are self-directed learners. Other educational resources may include visits to the circle by outside experts, and visits by the circle to places relevant to its studies.

Consistent with the emphasis on the collective nature of learning for adults here are no formal qualifications given at the end of the learning circle session. There are no examinations. There are no marks. There are no certificates. In short Learning Circles are very important learning technique for Adults who want to learn from and with one another in an informal manner.

The distinctive character of the learning circle in relation to traditional schooling is illustrated by the list of differences between a learning circle and a conventional course as presented in the following in Table:

Table 1: Comparison of Learning Circle and Conventional Classes

Learning Circles	Conventional Classes/Courses
Have facilitators elected by the group sitting among the group of 'colleagues'. You cannot see directly who is the facilitator or 'leader'	Have 'teachers' standing in a higher position than the 'students'. You can readily see who is the teacher and the teacher has the superior authority
Decide on a study path themselves – accept, reject or amend. LC members themselves decide.	Are generally presented with subjects and curriculum, which must be accepted. The teachers have pass or fail power over the students
Learners sit in a circle so they can see one another	Students sit at egg crate arranged desks and cannot see one another but all can see the teacher
Up to 15 members	Over 20 students
Learn from experience	Learn from books
Most members participate, the opportunity to talk is evenly distributed – learning for the people by the people through the people	Few students participate actively in 'lessons'. Teachers usually do most of the talking and students only talk when allowed to. Study for the system by its appointed power elite through the curriculum
Members work together (co-operate) for mutual goals for group achievement of a collective task not for specific credentials	Students work alone and compete for marks on the basis on individual projects for individual formal certification and achievement
Informal learning	Formal learning
Are trying to solve practical problems collectively through individual contributions thus increasing the members self-reliance and confidence and stimulating a critical and inquiring mind	Are most often expecting to be given solutions or there at least to be 'one' correct solution. Students are told the 'truth' by their teachers and texts, this more likely increasing students; dependence of authority
Communicative based on members own life experience	Intellectual based on text book written by 'powerful others'
Each session usually lasts 3 hours over several months or even years followed by an informal get together	Each class is usually one hour, in a structured 'time table' over a semester or term
Members will get to know each other quite well on a co-operative basis	Students often don't get this opportunity and relations remain impersonal and even competitive

Source: Paul Wildman Q2 02

Action Learning Circle Meeting Format and Process

Following on from the above points, each learning circle would have around 15 members, each session could start with a 15 minute welcome especially to any new members, a review of the previous meeting and members then clarifying the aim n the present meeting. It is best if someone can take down the key decisions (it is generally not necessary to take detailed minutes). After the opening the person who was elected to facilitate this particular meeting takes over and conducts the discussion segment. Generally speaking a guided discussion period of 2 hours at least is necessary to get to the heart of the matter. Following the s a 15 minute wrap up and debrief occurs with the task/facilitator/location of the next meeting being established.

The Actual Process

Allow time at the end of your ALC meeting for a 'closing round' to reflect on how the meeting went, how the group is going, how you are feeling about this and to clarify who will do what before the next meeting.

Some things to consider re:

- . Details of the next meeting
- . Whether the group feels the ALC has developed a democratic approach to its members, operations and subject matter – if not how can these be improved (topic for next meeting)
- . Distribution of material for the next session
- . Decisions on actions following this meeting – who will do what and how, this, will add up to meeting the CED aims of the group
- . Allow for individual feedback

How an action learning circle works

Knowledge is considered to evolve from the interaction between circle members and learning materials. Beside the acquisition of knowledge and shared understanding the learning circle emphasises personal development as well. Further when circle members undertake some action following from circle deliberations an action learning component is added. All this means that members become 'conscientised'. They will learn to think critically, show consideration, understanding and respect for other points of view, exchange ideas and experiences, share responsibility for decisions, jointly plan, undertake and review actions and experience a sense of community. Not bad for a few hours once a week eh?

In that the learning circle is a miniature democracy; its members acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for active participation in a democratic society. It is only a short step then to transfer the learning from learning circle to a political life and even work life eg. industrial democracy and quality circles. As Olof Palme, a former Prime Minister of Sweden has stated ' Sweden is to a considerable degree a learning circle democracy'. In this context is worth noting that many of Sweden's political leaders have

come from the learning circle movement. Further much of the process of conscientisation or action oriented consciousness raising in the women's movement in the 70's and men's movement in the 90's occurred through the 'learning circle'.

The leader is a key person in the learning circle. Theoretically, the members of the circle can elect to choose their own facilitator from within or outside the group. Facilitators have an organisational role in that they have to ensure that the learning and action progresses as anticipated by the members. They also have a social-emotional support role in that they need to promote a positive social climate at the meetings.

Linking to Action Learning

With the CED/AL process in the kit the learning circles emphasis needs to focus on greater understanding of local economic issues leading to action i.e. not only discussion and also ACTION – and then reflection on the outcomes of the action so we can learn to do an improved action next time round. This is the process of Action learning (AL).

The steps in an AL cycle are: → 1. Act → 2. Observe and learn; → 3. Reflect and discuss → 4. Plan a new action in relation to CED → 1. Act

Please note: These points although developed from experience and literature are suggestions only – individual learning circles should develop their own guidelines.

Mostly, they are very divided. Much of the controversy seems to be about the definition of "adult learner." A widely accepted definition comes from Arthur Chickering, from the National Commission on Higher Education and the Adult Learner, which defines "Adult Learner" as an individual whose major role in life is something other than full-time student.

Here are some general characteristics of child learners compared to adult learners.

Table 2: A comparison of Kid's and Adult's Learning - Pedagogy cp. Androgogy

CHILDHOOD - Pedagogy	ADULTHOOD - Androgogy
Children depend upon adults for material support, psychological support, and life management. They are other-directed.	Adults depend upon themselves for material support and life management. Although they must still meet many psychological needs through others, they are largely self-directed.
Children perceive one of their major roles in life to be that of learner.	Adults perceive themselves to be doers; using previous learning to achieve success as workers, parents, etc.
Children, to a large degree, learn what they are told to learn.	Adults learn best when they perceive the outcomes of the learning process as valuable--contributing to their own development, work success, etc.
Children view the established learning content as important because adults tell them it is	Adults often have very different ideas about what is important to learn.

important.	
Children, as a group within educational settings, are much alike. They're approximately the same age, come from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, etc.	Adults are very different from each other. Adult learning groups are likely to be composed of persons of many different ages, backgrounds, education levels, etc.
Children actually perceive time differently than older people do. Our perception of time changes as we age--time seems to pass more quickly as we get older.	Adults, in addition to perceiving time itself differently than children do, also are more concerned about the effective use of time.
Children have a limited experience base.	Adults have a broad, rich experience base to which to relate new learning.
Children generally learn quickly.	Adults, for the most part, learn more slowly than children, but they learn just as well.
Children are open to new information and will readily adjust their views.	Adults are much more likely to reject or explain away new information that contradicts their beliefs.
Children's readiness to learn is linked to both academic development and biological development.	Adults' readiness to learn is more directly linked to need--needs related to fulfilling their roles as workers, spouses, parents, etc. and coping with life changes (divorce, death of a loved one, retirement, etc.).
Children learn (at least in part) because learning will be of use in the future.	Adults are more concerned about the immediate applicability of learning.
Children are often externally motivated (by the promise of good grades, praise from teachers and parents, etc.)	Adults are more often internally motivated (by the potential for feelings of worth, self-esteem, achievement, etc.)
Children have less well-formed sets of expectations in terms of formal learning experiences. Their "filter" of past experience is smaller than that of adults.	Adults have well-formed expectations, which, unfortunately, are sometimes negative because they are based upon unpleasant past formal learning experiences.

Source: The above list comes from "Plan instruction for adults, Module N-4,"The National Centre for Research in Vocational Education. (1987) Ohio State University, Columbus, OH

From Pedagogy to Androgogy to Heutagogy

For Hase (2000) the next step is to continue the move from pedagogy to androgogy to heutagogy - androgogy with self direction, retrodution¹ and reflexion². Heutagogy

¹ Realists employ a *retroductive* strategy. They discover *underlying causal powers, structures and mechanisms* possibly responsible for empirical effects. Retrodution requires researchers to construct a *hypothetical* model or prototype that if it were to exist and act in the postulated way, would account for the phenomena in question. The reality of the postulated explanation must then be subjected to empirical scrutiny.

² Reflexion is a form of double loop learning where one reflects on the outcomes of ones actions in order to learn AND to change ones actions in future. See Argyris and Schon (1996), Knowles (1970). Indeed

evidences much of the braiding of thinking and doing discussed at length in the main body of this research project. The term is seldom seen in mainstream literature and so I have not sought to introject it into the main body of this report. It does however bear further attention and if the concept of exemplar project could be incorporated into such retroductive learning process.

Establishing a Bush Mechanics Institute/Subversity

So a form of self-directed double loop reflexive retroductive prototyping action learning developed initially for Adults is postulated as the most apropos for a Bush Mechanics Institute. Emphasis in any such institute would be given to a dispersed adult self directed web based self help type clearing house. Whereby folk could log on and evaluate their actions/exemplar projects and share information support ideas and intelligence and actional efficacies with like minded practical active wisdom people from around the globe. I would further propose an annual Bushy award and even review system like on Inventor type TV series. Governance would be a participatory democracy with strong elements of sociocracy embedded therein.

At this stage such are ideas and guides only design or implementation have not been envisaged in the foreseeable future however I remain convinced a Bush Mechanics Institute is a most actionable exemplar project.

Conclusion

It is not my intention to explore yet another concept such as Heutagogy in detail as this is beyond the scope of the present work, however the concept has merit and is most ably explicated by Hase and Kenyon (2000). On the basis of this somewhat initial overview of pedagogy, androgogy, and heutagogy it is I argue apropos to propose heutagogy as the underpinning epistemology for a Bush Mechanics Subversity, incorporating Adult Action Learning Circles.

On a larger scale John Ralston Saul in the 'Unconscious Civilisation' (1997) addresses issues raised by economic rationalism and its grip on the way in which we understand our lives. He proposes that there is an almost childlike way in which society avoids the reality of its situation, choosing instead to believe a fantasy perpetuated by a corporatist ideology. Legitimacy lies with conformist specialist groups who negotiate between themselves, supposedly for the common good. Saul suggests that corporatism places us in the grip of self-interest or, perhaps more accurately, makes us unable to make disinterested decisions at either a conscious or unconscious level. In either case, consciously or unconsciously, a person is striving, at worst for power and personal gain, or at best for continued survival in a competitive and corporate environment. Saul stresses that we are in fact losing the struggle for democracy and individualism despite increased access to knowledge, information and education. Instead we are succumbing, 'to the darker side within us and within our society'. Saul (1997:36).

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