

# PROBING MORE DEEPLY A MAJOR HISTORICAL EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF ADULT EDUCATION INTERNATIONALLY AND IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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*ABSTRACT:* The historical and philosophical foundation of adult education finds its origins and motivations stemming from various sources nationally and internationally. However, one not to be ignored pertinent epistemology source is the overall umbrella concept of piety and devotion including the three elements of religion, spirituality, and a personal relationship with the living God. Many activities of adult education are deeply rooted in the overall umbrella concept of piety and devotion foundations and the God who some of us declare openly that we serve with willing, humble, contrite, and grateful hearts as well as serving many constituencies with whom we are involved. Presently, it may be beneficial to remind ourselves and others that God (whom atheists and anti-theists say does not exist) has influenced some of the operationalization of adult education. From ancient times, the international Hebrew and Christian Scriptures identify Moses, Joshua, Paul, and Jesus (even at the age of 12) being involved in adult education. Long (1991) identifies ten early innovative adult educators (from 1591 to 1920) strongly lacking the religious dimension in their adult education writings. Knowles (1962, 1977) and Grattan (1955, 1959) substantiate that the Church was at the forefront in adult education in the USA during the first two centuries of our existence from 1600 on. Reischmann (2006) from Germany, states that the religious foundation is one source of adult education. Henschke also references many things in adult education he has accomplished are a result of the “Call of God” on his life which he has joyfully enacted.

*Keywords:* adult education, religion, Knowles, spiritual

The historical and philosophical foundation of adult education finds its origins and motivations stemming from various disciplines, fields of study, and historical sources. One source that seems especially pertinent and should not be ignored may be characterized as a religious, spiritual perspective. This approach, which represents a point of view held by people who declare they have a personal relationship with a God who is alive and active in their life presently, will be discussed in this paper as coming under the same umbrella term as piety or devotion as a source or foundation of adult education.

Many in the field of adult education research and practice recognize that many continuing activities of adult education are deeply rooted in piety or devotional foundations. We serve many constituencies with willing, humble, contrite, and grateful hearts.

From ancient times, the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures provide the following historical teachings that could represent and support the idea of adult education.

- Moses said, “Teach these precepts (from God giving the commandments) to your family when they lie down, rise up, go out, come in” (Deuteronomy 6:7);

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- Joshua 1:8 said, “This book of the Torah shall not depart out of your mouth, for you shall meditate upon it day and night that you may observe to do all that is written therein; then shall you make your way prosperous and then you shall have good success”;
- The Apostle Paul said, “Study to show yourself approved unto God a workman that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15); and,
- Jesus, at 12 years of age, even used adult education questioning and discussion techniques in the Temple at Jerusalem to help the doctors, lawyers, and priests learn some new things about God’s business (Luke 2:47-49).

### **A Few of the Author’s Observations From Various Other Authentic Historical Sources**

Adult education played a key role in the Christian Church to educate its members and share the doctrine. Adult education in the USA was greatly influenced and supported by the Christian community beginning in the 1600s (Grattan, 1955, 1959; Knowles, 1962/1977).

In 1925, Yeaxlee (1925) explored all the religious, spiritual, and non-materialistic dimensions of adult education from both historical and analytical perspectives. Over the past century, as the field of adult education has developed, there has been an acknowledgement and presence of religious and/or spiritual adult education. For example, a handbook of adult education in the US has been published every decade since 1960 (1960-2020). In each of the handbooks that describe the state of the field, chapters on religious and/or spiritual education can be found.

Conferences related to adult education and Christian faith were convened in 1959 and 1962. Based on the information shared at these meetings, the conference organizer, Little, published two books: *The Future Course of Christian Adult Education* (Little, 1959) and *Wider Horizons in Christian Adult Education* (Little, 1962).

Houle (1984) offered a unique perspective by enlarging the idea of adult education participation to include the total pattern of learning undertaken by an individual at any one time and the ways that pattern changes as life proceeds. One of the persons he included as a case example is Billy Graham, a Christian evangelist. Billy Graham is known to have had a transformative moment in the early years of his ministry. At that time, he struggled with doubts about the accuracy and authority of the Bible. The story goes that one moonlit night he dropped to his knees in tears and told God that from that point on, in spite of confusing passages in the Bible that he did not understand, he would completely trust the Bible as the sole authority for his life and ministry. It was a transformational learning experience. From that day forward, Billy’s life was blessed with unusual power and effectiveness to reach people across the world. During his life, he preached in 185 countries to over 210 million people.

According to Jarvis (1987), of the 13 adult education thinkers he included in the 20<sup>th</sup> century list, almost all of them acknowledged that religious belief influenced the growth of adult education. Nonetheless, some were more prominent and articulate in their belief than others.

Long (1991) identified ten early innovative adult educators from 1591 to 1920. The strong influence of the religious dimension is visible throughout with a generous amount of material on religion, evangelism, Sunday School, Chautauqua, prophesying, God, Bible, prayer, and other spiritual topics which are involved in undergirding the advancement of adult education.

Twenty-three (23) religious adult education books are referenced and described in Houle's (1992) bibliographic essay on *The Literature of Adult Education*.

Walter and Jarvis (1992) open their book with a debate regarding the nature of learning as a religious phenomenon. It also includes the relationship between faith and knowledge. Moreover, they document significant research in adult religious education.

Granger and Wilhoit (1993) edited a 24-chapter handbook entitled, *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Adult Education*.

Robinson (1993), an adult education professor, was an active layman in his church and conducted workshops based on his interest in the scriptures and religious topics.

Henschke (1998) suggested that some of the antecedents of andragogy find their deep roots in the Biblical Hebrew contexts. There was the Hebrew language, which explains much about teaching and learning. Some Hebrew scriptures illustrate the closeness of the potential of people for learning and couples it with the process of bringing this to reality. He also explains that the Zaddik Rabbi makes certain that his manner of life exemplifies and models what he is teaching. Henschke concluded with a story of the kind and humane treatment of an Orthodox Jew by a Christian community, thus influencing this Jewish person to devote his research as a university professor exclusively to study the life and teachings of Jesus.

Isaac's doctoral dissertation (1999) at the University of Georgia focused on Motivations of Adult Learners in Church Sponsored Adult Education in three Atlanta Black Churches of different sizes – 10,000 members, 5,000 members, and 1,500 members (*Understanding African American adult learners' motivations to learn in church-based adult education*).

Elias and Merriam (2004) presented various adult education philosophical schools of thought. Among them, they provide some pros and cons of the religious foundation of adult education.

English (2005), in her *International Encyclopedia of Adult Education*, includes a section on religious adult education.

Reischmann (2006) presented a Keynote Address at the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) in Milwaukee, in which he says that the religious foundation was one of four sources of adult education.

Isaac (2012) opened the dimensions of adult religious education as being rich with opportunities for study, service, program creation, teaching, learning, and adult development. Perspectives of eight different authors are included.

### **To the Present Time Within the Most Recent Dozen Years**

Carr-Chellman et al. (2021) have provided the most extensive article in the 2021 Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education as a framework for the umbrella topic of piety/devotion focusing on human flourishing. However, the scope of their coverage was limited to articles published including 2010 to 2018 from the following seven publications since the 2010 Handbook was published: **1. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 2. *Adult Learning*, 3. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*; 4. *Studies in the Education of Adults*; 5. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 6. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, and 7. *New Directions in Adult and Continuing Education*. They found 42 articles with only 11 drawing on data-based research with a minimum empirical foundation and very little theoretical foundation. They attempted mostly to emphasize religious adult education and spiritual adult education, attempting to separate from each other and then sought to reconnect and bring them back together.**

The only reference in the Carr-Chellman et al. (2021) article to ‘God’ is that God is a “what” (p. 298) a ‘thing’ that perhaps we may hook to our ideas. Nonetheless, there is no indication in the article that the ‘God’ who is referred to, is a living being. Maybe that ‘god’ is dead, as Hamilton in Colgate Rochester Divinity School and Altizer in Atlanta’s Emory University Theological School declared about 50 years ago when the ‘God is Dead’ movement emerged. When I question, “Whose God is Dead?” Maybe their ‘god’ is dead, but my God is very much alive, since I just talked with Him a few minutes before I wrote this. He was very much alive at that time and is alive this moment when you [the reader] are reading this.

In addition to the above elements of an epistemology, including religion and spirituality referred to above by Carr- Chellman et al. (2021) there is another element (a personal relationship with the Living God) that is covered within the umbrella of piety and devotion – including what Richardson (1977) refers to as the concept of humans having “eternity in their hearts” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). This idea the author of Ecclesiastes sets within the context of the totality of life – the practical aspects of living which God has given to human beings is that good in His sight: wisdom, knowledge, and joy. In Ecclesiastes 3, He says,

For everything there is a season, for every purpose under heaven, there is a right time – birth and death, planting and uprooting, killing and healing, tearing down and building, weeping and laughing, mourning and dancing, throwing stones and gathering stones, embracing and refraining, searching and giving up, keeping and

discarding, tearing and sewing, keeping silent and speaking, loving and hating, war and peace.

All this is part of the task God has given humanity to keep us occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Nevertheless, over and beyond all of these practical daily matters, there is another dimension beyond time, and this is accomplished in such a way that human beings can't really, fully comprehend at this time, that God has set "*eternity in their hearts*" (Ecclesiastes 3:11; Richardson, 1977, Back Cover).

However, from beginning to end, all the things God does will last forever throughout eternity. In this life, according to Isaiah 64:4 and I Corinthians 2:9-10 the writer says,

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of us human beings, the things which God has prepared for them who love Him. But God has revealed this treasure unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

Nevertheless, the reality is

...this treasure we have in clay pots, so that the overwhelming power comes from God and not us. In this life: we have all kinds of trouble, but we are not crushed; we are perplexed, yet not in despair; persecuted, yet not abandoned; knocked down, yet not destroyed. II Corinthians 4:7-9

Nothing or no one will be able to separate us from God's powerful love in Messiah Yeshua: trouble, hardship, hunger, poverty, danger, war...no, we are superconquerors through Him who powerfully loved us – neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly powers, neither what exists nor what is coming; neither powers above nor powers below, nor any other created thing – will be able to separate us from God's love. Romans 8:35, 37-39

Moreover, in eternity, God tells us in Isaiah 65:17 and Revelation 21:1-4

I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered or come into the heart...and I (God) will wipe away all tears from your eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain

for as Psalm 16:11 declares, "I (God) will be present with you on the path of life where there is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore." According to John 3:16, Romans 10:9-10, and Ephesians 1:19-20, God accomplished this by His loving the world so much that he gave His only Begotten Son (Jesus Christ) to die on the Cross of Calvary to forgive us of all our sins, and He raised Jesus from the dead; if we believe on Him, He will provide us the gift of everlasting life now and eternally in heaven. Moreover, I Corinthians 15:25-26 assures us "God will finally destroy all His and our enemies and the last enemy that shall be destroyed is *death*."

This element of “eternity in their hearts” (Richardson. 1977, Back Cover) began to emerge in the New Testament era (CE) on Mars Hill in Athens, Greece where accomplished philosophers gathered for discussions and there was reference to a vague, unknown ‘god’ whose name no one knew. Various ancient peoples had a book about that ‘god’, but they had lost the book, somehow hoping someone would find it and return it to them. Then some people with strange customs and scholars with strange theories thought they were discovering something about this and becoming clearer about the identity of this ‘god’. Suddenly the ‘book’ mentioned above appeared in the hand of some visitor to their location. After reading the introduction to the book, the ‘God’ that appeared had the name of ‘Yahweh’, whose initial articulation to a person named Abraham was a promise [in the form of a covenant], “I will make you into a great nation; and I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you – you will be a blessing.” Yahweh completes the statement to Abraham, by saying, “...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Hmm – sounds something like a hint of “human flourishing” going on or at least implied that was included in the title of the Carr-Chellman et al. (2021) chapter mentioned above. This “blessing” of everyone, seemed to be the major purpose and theme of the book, which turns out to be (Genesis 12:1-3) from the Bible.

Upon these various peoples going through the book, the best they could calculate, about 2000 years later a man named Jesus Christ of Nazareth (a Jewish rabbi/teacher/facilitator of learning, no less) appears on the scene and one day He got up on a hillside and called a gathering of his learners (called disciples) to gather around him and began to teach them perhaps His best lesson ever – to help them learn what we may call it in our parlance of today (Matthew 5:3-12). Again, sounds like another hint of “human flourishing” mentioned previously by Carr-Chellman et al. I quote from Matthew 5:3-12: **“How blessed are –**

- the poor in spirit! for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
- those who mourn! for they will be comforted.
- the meek! for they will inherit the Land!
- those who hunger and thirst for righteousness! for they will be filled.
- those who show mercy! for they will be shown mercy.
- the pure in heart! for they will see God.
- those who make peace! for they will be called sons and daughters of God.
- those who are persecuted because they pursue righteousness! for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
- We [you & me] when people insult us and persecute us and tell all kinds of vicious lies about us because we follow Jesus! Rejoice, be glad, because your reward in heaven is great – they persecuted the prophets before you in the same way.

This section has added the element of a personal relationship with the Living God to piety and devotion as part of an epistemology – *Eternity in their Hearts* by Richardson (1977). If one reads the book, noting all the references that express and describe the kind of learning that was taking place, I found it to be a rich history of adult education (found in no other book on adult education’s history). This article does not afford space to

include and articulate the learnings garnered by the people referenced in the Richardson book. Nonetheless, there is a wealth of history and description regarding adult learning that cannot be overlooked if one is serious about garnering another aspect of adult learning.

### **My Personal and Professional Story**

I would be remiss if I only included others' viewpoints regarding the influence of God and religion or spirituality and aspects of piety/devotion upon their adult education research, theory, and practice.

I am in the adult education and human resource development field because the Call of the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is upon my life to do this – it is my motivation!!! The Glory of all this goes to Him, not me. Following are a few of the things that I have done, within my Call from Him, and contributed to the field of adult education and human resource development.

I am grateful for vibrant health and length of life thus far at age 89 years at the present in 2021. I learn continuously as I teach and research. In one article that threaded together elements of adult and community health education, I used the materials to help develop and maintain a long, healthy life (Henschke, 2014). I include many Bible passages in my work as the Word of God. They have helped me learn to live long and healthily. My beliefs, attitudes, values, and stages of life are all central to my perspective on health.

I have developed workshops based on an article from 2007 (Henschke, 2007) that provided materials for a lay ministry group of learning facilitators, working in a church setting. Included were such things as: assumptions concerning adults as learners, processes for actively engaging adults in Modified Instructional Perspectives Inventory (MIPI), a model for preparation of teachers of adults, building blocks for adult learning foundations, a living lecture for a large group of adults to become 'alive' in applying andragogy (the art and science in helping facilitate the learning of adults) as they learn to lead and help adults learn, and evaluate their own learning process.

During the many years of my service to God and the field of adult education as a professor, I have many accomplishments. I have served **61** doctoral students at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and Lindenwood University, St. Charles, MO by chairing their dissertation committees. I also served as a member of **55** other doctoral students on their dissertation committees at six different universities across the USA and around the world.

The Modified Instructional Perspectives Inventory (MIPI) that I developed and used has been validated with a Cronbach Alpha three times for Reliability with Adult Educators. The field has benefitted from this measurement tool of learning, and it has been employed in **35** completed Doctoral Dissertations at eight different universities around the globe and is in the process of being used in several other dissertations.

Over the years, I have received **36** different awards in adult education, including being inducted with the 1998 class into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall

of Fame (IACEHOF). These are meaningful recognitions of my work and service and longevity to the field of adult education. Most prominently, I fulfilled the Office of President/Chair for four different Adult and Continuing Education Associations – one each in an International, National, Regional, and a State Organization:

- International – International Adult & Continuing Education Hall of Fame (IACEHOF) 2014 & 2015,
- National – American Association for Adult & Continuing Education (AAACE) 1996-1997,
- Regional – Missouri Valley Adult Education Association (MVAEA), 1988-1989,
- State – Missouri, USA / Para, Brazil Partners of the Americas (MO/PA POA); 1994-1996.

I also have served as a Member of the Board of Directors of the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame (IACEHOF) for seven years (2007 – 2013) and served as Chair of the Hall for the years of 2014 and 2015.

My publication and presentations have been plentiful and have covered many topic areas. They include 675 different paper presentations and workshops at adult and continuing education and human resource development conferences or events, 323 research articles and book chapters published in adult and continuing education and human resource development literature. In addition, I have co-edited an update of one book and single authored/published a 423-page book entitled, *Facilitating adult and organizational learning through andragogy: A history, philosophy and major themes*. This is the capstone work of my academic career in andragogy.

Three hundred twenty-three of my research materials and other workshops are posted on the International Adult and Continuing Education Virtual Hall of Fame (IACEVHOF) website. They have been downloaded and shared to **2,249** universities in **182** countries almost **43,199** times from **2/17/15** to **10/3/21**. During **September 2021**, **1,109** new downloads were taken from all the papers. There were also **974** referrals from three Henschke websites. The top paper that was downloaded more than **6,331** times is entitled: *“Considerations of the Future of Andragogy”*.

I also have had the fortune to have conducted adult and continuing education and human resource development conferences, workshops and keynotes in **19** countries including the USA, Canada, United Kingdom, Brazil, Egypt, Jordan, Cyprus, Mali, South Africa, Slovenia, Italy, Austria, Germany, Thailand, People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong, Australia, Taiwan, and Romania. I also have worked with adult and continuing educators from 97 different foreign countries.

### **Summary Thoughts and Reflections**

This article reflects my perspective of being called by God as well as glorifying Him to joyously devote **53** years of my life doing adult education and human resource



development. My immediate family had a deep, Christian, spiritual impact on me and helped to foster my life call from the Lord.

- Dad’s favorite Bible verse was Matthew 6:33 “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [food, clothing, and shelter] will be added unto you.”
- Mom’s favorite Bible verse was I Corinthians 10:31 “Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”
- My sister Joyce’s favorite Bible verse was Colossians 1:18 “...that in all things, Jesus Christ may have the preeminence.”
- My sister Doris had her Bible all marked up, which meant that she had many favorite Bible verses; and that was an inspiration to me.
- My wife, Carol’s favorite Bible verse is Romans 8:28 “We know that all things work together for good, to them who love the Lord, to them who are the called according to His purpose.”
- My favorite Bible verse is Psalm 32:8 “I (God) will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go; I will guide you with my eye upon you.”

Additional evidence could be presented, but this is at least a start to support the idea that God (the one that both atheists and anti-theists insist does not exist) should be included in the foundational history and philosophy of adult education in the USA, other parts of the world, and back into ancient times. This is coupled with scriptural and live illustrations of how this is enacted in the reality of my own long blessed and grateful life.

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