

PERSPECTIVES ON PEOPLE

A Lifetime of Service: Dr. John Arthur Henschke

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John Henschke is a lifelong learner who studied with Malcolm Knowles and who interviewed and knew such adult educators as Cyril Houle and his contemporaries. John has devoted his life to service both in the ministry and in education; he has traveled the globe with a view to encouraging lifelong learning and the concepts of andragogy for all. His accomplishments have earned him a place as one of the major leaders in adult education. This Perspective on John is based on my knowledge of him during our work experience together and several validating conference meetings with him during 2006.

John has taught learners from 84 different countries, focusing on one major theme, andragogy, the art and science of helping adults learn. Teaching in the United States and visiting China, Brazil, England, Scotland, Europe, and other countries, even on vacation, Dr. Henschke makes it a point to visit educational organizations to share ideas about lifelong learning. A friend and colleague for over a decade, I have had unique access to the life and times of John Arthur Henschke. Together, we have worked toward a better understanding of lifelong learning globally (King & Wang, 2007). After a number of formal interviews, informal sharing of ideas, and joint research projects, I am still learning about, and from, John. When asked if he is a lifelong learner, he replies, *not yet*, so if you are wondering if this is everything about Dr. Henschke, I have to also say, *not yet*.

In 2004, the Adult Education program at the University of Missouri-St. Louis received the Malcolm S. Knowles Outstanding Program Award from the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE). It was awarded specifically to Dr. Henschke because of his unwavering commitment to adult education and the program, being the only faculty member for 16 years with a 50% faculty appointment in the School of Education. Averaging 130 graduate students, it wasn't until 1999 that additional faculty were hired to assist with the program, myself and Dr. E. Paulette Isaac. How did he continue under such seemingly difficult circumstances? Perhaps some of the experiences leading up to his current position will assist in understanding this adult educator.

Henschke – The Learning Years

While still in high school and working in a bank, John Henschke traveled with his sisters as a musical evangelistic team. Like many adult learners, it was 2 years before he went to college. After getting the call, he began studying for the ministry first at Northwestern University in Minneapolis from 1951-1953, and then at Bob Jones University, Greenville, South Carolina,

where he received a BA in English, Biblical Studies, and Music, and in Instrumental and Vocal in 1955.

John then moved to Chicago where he attended Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, and again worked in a bank. During this time he met his lifelong helpmate, Carol, who was an undergraduate in Christian Studies there. In 1958, he received his Master of Divinity in administration and Philosophical Theology and married. Still working on his professional growth and personal development, John continued at Northern Baptist Seminary in Pastoral counseling, completing a Masters of Theology in 1963.

John believes that he has had two major callings in his life. The first was to the ministry. Beginning in 1957, his service manifested itself in the ministry. He discusses this in his personal autobiography (Armstrong, Nabb, & Czeck, 2007). He has served in a number of churches, ranging in membership from 100-800, as Senior Minister, administrator, educator, counselor, pastor, and interim minister. In the late 1960s, John received another call, this time to education.

Deciding that a doctoral degree would assist in securing a place in higher education, John asked where there were appropriate programs of study. A mentor gave him a list of four universities. He contacted all of them, and of the four, he says that he is still waiting to hear from one. He was looking at studies in educational leadership. When he went to Boston University, he spoke to Gene DuBois and knew he was in the right place when asked, "How can we help you?" His advisor soon became Malcolm S. Knowles. The question he was initially asked has become the underlying philosophy of John's teaching and learning philosophy.

Henschke – The Teaching Years

Although the heading makes a distinction between his formal education and his teaching in higher education, John had always found teaching to be a defining part of him. In 1970, he accepted a position in University Outreach and Extension in the University of Missouri System; a position he holds until this day. At that time he had yet to complete his graduate degree and was jokingly accused of "bowing to the east" each morning being a student of Knowles. In fact, many adult educators were concerned that John was part of a cult of personality because he had decided to do a historical portrait of Knowles. When John asked about this possibility, Knowles stepped down as his advisor, and off his committee, and Gene DuBois became his chair.

As a way of explaining that he only does what he wants to do, not what others such as Knowles tell him, John recounts the following story:

It goes back to when I'm three years old. We had a Sunday school Christmas program. Everybody had a piece to say. I had my piece and I had it all down pat, had it memorized and so forth. The time came for me to get up to the platform to give my piece and I said no ... Nothing anyone could say could make me change my mind. (Personal communication, December, 2006)

From the very beginning John was his own man, and in my personal experience, with the possible exception of the care of learners, he never does anything that is not part of what he wishes. As much as he respected Knowles, he didn't always agree with him.

In addition to the literature of adult education, interviews with Knowles and his colleagues provided the data for John's study (Henschke, 1973). He received his doctorate while in Missouri, working in extension. At this time, he was concerned that he might never be a professor of adult education. In fact, he was considering giving up the idea. However, with encouragement from his wife, he thought:

I may go to my grave and never be a professor of adult education. . . All this time I was preparing myself in all the work that I did in continuing education and extension and I would always say to myself, how would a professor of adult education act in this situation? That's how I would act. In every program that I did I was being a professor of adult education. I was trying myself out. I was being what I wanted to be even though I wasn't that. In anticipation of the hope that someday it would take place.

So in his role as a Continuing Education Specialist, Dr. Henschke was being an adult educator as he provided education for healthcare, an occasional university course, the community, and other state agencies.

After working in this capacity for 6 years, John had the opportunity to join the faculty at the University of Missouri – St. Louis. Beginning as a non-tenured associate professor, he kept a 50% extension appointment and came to what was then the School of Education with a 50% appointment. When that happened, this is what he had to say:

The day finally came that it took place. The fact is, that it wasn't until after I got here, got into doing what I had done, building this program in adult education, basically from scratch, I said I'm going to give myself five years to get this thing up and running. It wasn't until after I got here that I realized the real reason that I hadn't gotten any of those other jobs, or that it didn't happen before it happened, is that I wasn't ready.

The Lord knew when I was prepared to step in to do this job. I was being prepared by patience, my patience being tried and honed. I was being prepared by continuing to read everything that I could get my hands on in adult education, and to act like a professor of adult education. I was not acting as a phony kind of thing. I was always trying to figure out how I would act in this situation if I were a professor of adult education. . . . I realized that I was not prepared to do that before that time. (Personal communication, December, 2006)

Not being tenured, there were years when John wasn't sure he would be returning. However, being authentic in his teaching and learning, kept the learners coming:

My extension work keeps my theory solidly based and my campus work keeps my practice theoretically sound. (Personal communication, December, 2006)

Serving Lifelong Learners

For John Henschke, everything is learner-centered; whether in the community, church, workplace, or the university, the learner comes first. This learner-centered attitude goes against

the prevailing attitudes found at most universities. However, an authentic educator, John believes there is no other way, unlike a comment made by another professor, “this would be a good job, if it wasn’t for the students” (Personal communication, December, 2006).

“It’s leadership-one who serves,” says John paraphrasing the teachings of Jesus. Husband, father, grandfather, minister, educator, John is there to serve. Unlike the university system that separates the service component from teaching and research, for John, service is a part of everything. Well known globally, John is always in search of new ideas on lifelong learning. He is well published, but rather than seeking prestigious journals with limited readership, he seeks venues that will reach the greatest number of people. In fact, all of his publications and citations on his current research can be accessed at his personal web page, <http://www.umsl.edu/~henschke>, by anyone. Well published authors seek him out for information that he gives freely, often not even being cited. He serves the academic community, students, and educators alike, by making information available. It has been a privilege to share the office next to him for seven years; it was like having access to a walking encyclopedia. Additionally, when I sought him out to gain further insight into a controversial concept that I thought was just common sense, I was invited to join him in his research. Many times someone stops by his office to ask a question and have left with enough documents and information to write their own paper. His life is about helping and service.

In closing, John Arthur Henschke epitomizes the best of what I believe an adult educator should be. He does not seek his own aggrandizement, is ultimately loyal to the learners, and facilitates learning wherever he goes. To me, there is no better compliment than to be compared to John when it comes to teaching and learning. A past president of the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE, 2005); recipient of the 2005 Outstanding Service Medallion (AAACE); National Recognition of Missouri State Distinguished Service Award (Epsilon Sigma Phi National Honorary Extension Society, 2004); Nicolas R. Casticone Award for Excellence in Inter-American University Programs (Partners of the Americas, Inc., 1998); Inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame in 1998; and 13 other awards attest to the service that he provides. A true leader, John would like to hear from you if you would like to continue the dialogue.

References

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