Chapter 3

From Logos to Eros and Back Again: An Exploration of the Foundations of Informal Learning and Tacit Knowledge

Al Lauzon
University of Guelph, Canada

ABSTRACT

This chapter begins by highlighting both the centrality of learner experience and the challenges it presents to adult educators. This provides an overall context for situating the main focus of this chapter—tacit knowledge and its relationship to informal learning. This chapter then provides an articulation of the foundation of tacit knowledge, an unbounded and undisciplined knowledge characterized as a product of Eros rather than Logos, a knowledge that is both participatory and intimate. It is then argued that this form of knowledge requires an emergent way of knowing the world called vision-logic, followed by an exploration of how temporally and spatially bound knowledge is developed out of interacting knowledges. The chapter concludes by examining the relationship between knowledge grounded in Eros with knowledge grounded in Logos, arguing that these two forms of knowledge are complementary.

INTRODUCTION

Central to adult education and learning has been the idea of learner experience. And despite the platitudes we often hear with regard to learner experience, educators often have a hard time dealing with it. Do we try to integrate their experience in meaningful ways with the curriculum? Or do we simply allow them to articulate their experience and move on to the real learning? These are challenges that I think plague most adult educators: what to do with learner experience.

There is one form of adult learning where experience is always front and center and that is informal learning, the learning that takes place outside of formal and non-formal educational contexts. But informal learning is not a well-understood phenomenon, and there is informal learning that focuses on the acquisition of explicit knowledge, and then there is informal learning...
that leads to the development of tacit knowledge. This chapter focuses on the tacit dimension of informal learning.

Thomas (1999) has suggested that learning has been essential to the survival of our species as we have faced and mastered the challenges that confronted us, and optimized the opportunities that were presented to us. As Thomas wrote, while learning is a need, “it is also the means of satisfying all other needs (1991, p. 1).” Learning, in the context of our species, has been mostly embedded within our day-to-day lives; we have learned as we negotiated the day-to-day realities we confront. Simply stated, learning was part and parcel of life; to learn was to survive and to survive meant one had learned for behaviour was and is a product of what we have learned (either consciously or unconsciously). In our day-to-day lives we learn in and through the fullness of our being and through this learning the relationships which we derived from learning, we created what is essential to us—meaning. And in this sense, all learning for most of our species history was what we now understand to be informal learning for there was no specific institution that was responsible for learning or education; learning took place in the context of a lived life and not separate from it. That changed, however, with the rise of technical-rationality as an organizing structure of consciousness and the increasing differentiation of human societies. As I have noted in earlier works (Lauzon, 1995; 1998a), while the rise of technical-rationality has its foundations in symbolic logic in Greek and Roman culture, it became the dominant structure of consciousness as a result of the scientific and industrial revolutions. These revolutions then gave birth to the idea of public education and the institutionalization of learning for the masses whereby knowledge was acquired separate from one’s life in special institutions known as schools, colleges and universities. Learning became synonymous with teaching and knowledge was acquired in these special institutional contexts to be applied in contexts other than the one in which knowledge was acquired. The dominant mode of knowing was the technical-rational and there is little place for either affect or the body; education was the education of mind and as Lauzon (1998a) notes this domination by the rational mind has led to our alienation from self, others and creation. Lauzon then argues that despite the challenges we face and need to address—increasing environmental destruction, diversity and rising socioeconomic inequities (1998a)—we need to heal ourselves and creation through a reclamation of our wholeness and return learning to assist in negotiating our day-to-day lives (2013); we must escape learning as being only what happens in education and recognize that learning happens in all of, and throughout life.

Informal Learning and Knowledge

While education has been influential in determining what we mean by learning, there are, however, other forms of learning that have been designated as informal learning in opposition to the very idea that all learning is a product of education. Hrimech (2005) has suggested that while there is no accepted formal definition of informal learning, there are four forms of informal learning that can be identified. However, the first three forms of informal learning share a number of attributes, including: learner set goals and objectives, albeit in differing contexts; identifying learning resources and supports through which learning will be accomplished; and deciding on mechanisms for evaluating whether learning has been successful according to the conditions the learner has set. And while informal learning is sometimes associated with formal or non-formal educational contexts, it is predominately thought of as learning in the context of day-to-day lives outside of educational programming. These three forms of informal learning deal with technical-rational knowledge, knowledge that is codified,