Essay:

Spirit, Soul, and Dialectical Thinking in Adult Learning

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A discussion about spirit and soul in an adult learning scenario should start examining the definition and purpose of adult learning. The approach to this term involves many learning theories such as: behaviorism, humanism, constructivism, and critical theory. In addition, many types of adult learning like: instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory learning (Nesbit, Brigham, Taber, & Gibb, 2013, pp. 95-100).   Per instance, if we just consider UNESCO's focus: "… educational processes, whatever the content…whereby people regarded as adults by the society to which they belong: develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge…turn them in a new…development" (Spencer & Lange, 2014, p. 8). It will be difficult to find the role of the spirit and the soul in such consideration.

Understanding "spirit" and "soul" in relation to adult learning

According to Millers and Moore, soul is not an entity but a process or animating energy. It is also a facet to undergo life, and it is located between understanding and unconsciousness (MacKeracher, 2004, p. 173). For some theorists learning coming from spirit and soul is somatic or laced to our physical sensations. As Amann suggested in her four-part model of somatic learning "… and spiritual (making meaning through music, art, imagery, symbols and rituals)" (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 195).   While for others as Tisdell (1999), it is manifested by internal contemplation and has nothing to do with religion.

For many, MacKeracher's (2004) approach to spirit and soul terms, could be an 'uncomplicated' way to begin the understanding of these endless definitions. As she explains, while our spirit further away the boundaries of our body and mind. Our soul is busy with every day ordinaries. However, both animating energies 'partnership' in order to find the meaning of

our life experiences or to build our awareness. "… soul is grounded in the ordinary details of everyday life… spirit arises from a need to transcend the messy conditions of life to find 'an expression' of meaning that will take one up…" (p. 172).

One of the purposes of adult learning is to build our conscience. From the spirit perspective, adult learning looks for higher explanations of our life experiences. For this to happen, soul and spirit through visualizations, dreams or meditation provide relevant information for transformative learning in an unreasonable way. "… windows into development and transformational learning… enable us to make sense of our experience, which is what adult learning is all about" (Merriam et. al., 2007, p. 215).

MacKeracher's dream (2004, pp. 181-184) is a clear example of this dialogue. First, she allowed herself to feel the sadness and intrigue that the dream brought to her. Second, she recorded the dream in detail, preserving the vision from any modification. Third, she enabled a period of time to contemplate and reflect about the imagines. Finally, she was able not only to recognize the symbols her soul used in the dream, but also the outcome of the 'dialogue' between her soul and spirit. Resulting in a new level of awareness that provided her with a greater confidence by consciously resolving self-inconsistencies.

The role of dialectical thinking, spirit, and soul in adult learning

If one of the purposes of adult learning in the scenario of spirit and soul is to grow awareness or to find the explanation of life experiences. There is a pertinent space for Freire's conscience process or conscientization in such thread (Heinz-Peter, 1993, p.11). While conscientization allows us the understanding of the social-cultural-political surroundings in order to transform this reality aimed by the new knowledge acquired voluntary. Soul and spirit provide

important information for transformative learning in an unreasonable and involuntary fashion. Then somehow there has to be dialogue between soul, spirit, consciousness and unconsciousness to build awareness. As it happens in dialectical conversation among society members.

Conversation and dialogue happen when the understanding of an object is extended by accepting the considerations of others. It results almost unthinkable a dialectical epistemology in an uncommunicative environment (Ilyenkov, 2007, p. 3). Therefore, the dialectical thinking amid soul, spirit, consciousness and unconsciousness could be very similar to Freire's conscientization cognitive. This time in a different tier and nourished not only by the interactions of our somatic side, but by the spirit. As Vasconcelos (1925, p. 48) beautifully describes in his impressive speech about diversity and critical thinking: "The spirit will talk for my race".

In this supreme form of conversation soul and spirit talk with each other. Our soul goes through all our experiences, as our spirit builds our consciousness and high values. "In our spirituality, we reach for consciousness, awareness and high values; in our soulfulness, we endure the most pleasurable and exhausting of human experience and emotions" (Moore, 1992, p. 231).

Many classic authors refer to this paramount dialogue using symbols in a similar manner than in MacKeracher's dream. A precious illustration is the conversation of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, where Don Quixote (the spirit) repeatedly tells Sancho (the soul) that he does not understand what he says. Then, Sancho uses other representations until Don Quixote understands Sancho. However, is actually the writer himself, Cervantes, who receives the resulting new understanding. As it is seen in chapter VII (Cervantes, 1615):

-Once or twice – Sancho said-, if I remember rightly, I have begged to your worship not to amend my words, if you understand what I mean with them, and when you do not

understand them, say: "Sancho or devil, I do not understand you!"; and if I will not

clarify them, then you can amend me, since I am so Focil.

-Sancho I do not understand you - Don Quixote said- , since I do not know the meaning

of: "I am so Focil".

- "So Focil" means -said Sancho- "I am just like I am".

-Now I understand you even less -Don Quixote said-.

-Now, I see -Don Quixote said- What you want to say is that you are so docile, soft and

amenable, that you will take into account what I told you and you will take what I teach

you.

Adult learning should sustain this supreme form of conversation to develop critical, creative and discipline learners. "Education that nourish the soul involves more than emotion and develops in the learner a creative, discipline quality of mind. Such education begins through nurturing the imagination, not to create fantasies, but to discover the patterns that weave us together with the world (MacKeracher, 2004, p.175).

Some teaching strategies to foster spirit and soul in adult learning

There has to be open room for respectful dialogue and creativity. Typical curricula "must be replaced with playfulness, openness, creativity, and imagination" (Merriam et. al., 2007, p. 204). In such scenario dialogue should be the artistry of finding the truth by discussing community's views. As in Marx's dialectical thinking where social reflection exercise (Ilyenkov, 2007, pp.1-5) challenges our social epistemology moving us from the subject to the object in order to find simple solutions. Communication to learn doesn't mean a discussion between two teams with a teacher's recognition to the winner. Communication to learn or "talking to learn" is

an environment of "respect, empathy, and perspective sharing" that allows a better and larger understanding (Salas, Fitchett, & Mercado, 2013, p. 1).

Although teaching about spirit and soul does not require to actually submerge the learner in a higher state of consciousness. It is expected instruction about alpha and theta waves, as well as altered states of consciousness such dream sharing, metaphors, analogies, chaotic activities, etc. Where the instructor is anticipated to help sharing holistic experiences. And, teaching how to remember experiences while 'walking down' from high levels of conscious (MacKeracher, 2004, p. 178).

Discernment should be prevented in spiritual learning, in such learning there is no room for good or bad. Instead, questioning in this field should be what comes with each experience, imagine, sound or notion. It is also transcendental that the learner realizes the importance of finding a personal strategy to record thoughts, images and experiences since the learner can impromptu alter them later. MacKeracher mentions that spiritual learning is favored by connecting with unlikely places. However, this might be topic of discussion (p.178).

Spirit and soul in our own teaching and learning

Although it looks like there is not much room to teach about spirit and soul for a Computer Science instructor. We would like adults learning: computer languages, strategies to develop and design new algorithms and computer systems to be creative, critical thinkers, and discipline people. Therefore, our students should not only learn dialectical thinking, but also the supreme form of conversation between soul, spirit, consciousness and unconsciousness.

In such way, our students will be able to use critical thinking and critical theory while developing new algorithms and computer systems, while mastering different computer languages to transmit knowledge inspired by dialectical thinking and the spirit. Critical thinking will be

their 'weapon' to fight ignorance and unawareness. And, critical theory will be their 'radar' to aim them finding nescience. As Spencer and Lange (2014, p. 81) explain:

> *Critical thinking examines a world of "objects" from the perspective of the individual "subject"; that is, from the point of view of human being as a self-conscious, autonomous, rational agent.*
>
> *Critical theory, on the other hand, explores a word comprised of individual "subjects" and "objects," making individual thought process and beliefs, as well as the material "objects" that human "subjects" relate to, its focus of study.*
>
> *Unlike critical thinking, critical theory focuses on the social norms and conventions that "distort" the understanding of individual subjects to such an extent that no amount of logical rigour or conceptual clarity (critical thinking) will remove these distortions.*

In other words, our students will be able to 'create' new Classes and Objects before developing new algorithms and computer systems not just using critical thinking and critical theory. But by applying the supreme form of conversation between soul and spirit into this. Then, they will be able to fight ignorance and bring new knowledge into computer science.

Conclusion

The role of dialectical thinking, spirit, and soul in adult learning might be a powerful tool for educators even in unthinkable areas, like technical sectors. Since this knowledge not only provides internal balance to learners, but also it could represent a source of new ideas and creativity.

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