

In recent decades we've become more conscious of neocortical-emotional "readiness" as a learning factor in human development, and now happily more attention is being given to the "willingness" [euagogic/dysagogic] factor. Using the medical model we could speak of learning health (being highly motivated to learn and therefore "easily led" [lit., "euagogic"], eager to grow in knowledge, skills, wisdom) and learning pathology (being motivated to resist learning [lit., "dysagogic," "hard" to learn and to teach]). "Readiness" is the possibility of being open to learn, "willingness" is the actuality thereof. To make the situation more complicated, our society's learning opportunities are only somewhat available to the ready and willing and are to some extent forced on both the unready and the unwilling. In an adult education group one usually finds both: the eager (because earlier opportunities were not up to readiness and willingness) and the dysagogic (because the adult educational situation triggers sour memories of premature and force-fed "educational" processes at earlier stages of the person's life), the majority being ambivalent (swinging in support between the other two groups). A fourth component, sometimes even more disturbing than the dysagogic, is made up of folks whose ego-identification involves the obtrusive claim of being [one might say] "learned up," i.e. both up-to-date in education and adult-educated [in the current adult-educational processes, games, and emphases]. A dangerous mixed-type is the learned-up dysagogue, a put-down artist who constantly complains of being put down.

THERE IS NO SINGLE STYLE the adult-education teacher can embrace that will at once outwit the dysagogy in a group and motivate to euagogy. "Coming on weak" (so that the group's natural leadership will emerge, in its knowledge-and-skills distribution) is an agony for everybody; the agony may be destructive or creative or both, but content other than personal agenda will be long in getting to. "Coming on strong" results in sharper though shorter agony, an open warfare in which the dysagogic and the learned-up are defeated or at least silenced or (it may well be) driven away. The Willisian style is to come on both strong and weak, in hope of achieving the values of both. Its virtue is that it does take both ends of the persons/tasks polarity seriously. Its trouble is that it doesn't work very well. Nothing does, as far as I know. Except dealing with the adult-education types in different groups, as follows: GROUP A (the euagogic), GROUP B (the dysagogic, those with learned learning disabilities but who are willing to work at therapy), GROUP C (the usuals, who "sorta liked school, but not much" --but now are motivated to learn), and GROUP D (the learned-up)--and then, most difficult of all, GROUP E (the learned-up dysagogues). But separation is hothouse.

One way to analyze an adult-education group is to note SPASTIC WORDS (terms one or more students are inflexible and uptight about). Another way, to note CODE WORDS. Let's take one of the latter: "hurt." It may mean (1) to harm or (2) to occasion pain. Somebody in the group gets to feeling hurt, violated, put down: who's blame is it? Probably the situation is not 3 [deliberate malevolence of teacher or another student], but 3 is the easiest interpretation for the hurt person to arrive at. How about 4? If goodwill dominates the group, as almost certainly it did at the start, 4 is improbable but could happen: life (in or out of groups), is dangerous; teacher or fellow-student may accidentally do you harm; you take your chances with the rest, and the possibility of being damaged is part of the excitement (as in mountain-climbing). How about 5? Improbable; some sadism in the group perhaps, not much; some pedagogical pain (as when teacher traps you, to release you to a larger space than before), but again not much intentional; some accidental, of course. And 6? Much, if the group is doing human business; pain you give yourself from old traumas, offenses, frustrations, turn-offs.

