

Learning as dwelling

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Abstract

Drawing on insights offered by anthropologist Tim Ingold, this article argues that the phrase 'learning as dwelling' (a phrase indebted to Martin Heidegger) is a particularly powerful way of characterising human learning processes. Rather than positing humans as isolated subjects who can conceive of the world prior to acting upon it, the dwelling perspective suggests that, from the outset, humans are inextricably entwined in the processes of reality. Learning for dwellers is not a process of incorporating external knowledge into their minds. Rather, learning is best conceived as a process through which learners forever weave themselves into the fabric of their natural, social and cultural worlds. The article suggests that thinking of learning as dwelling not only provides a basis for escaping the strictures of dominant cognitivist and individualistic notions of learning but also enables us to avoid the relativism and abeyant liberalism of postmodernism. Learning as dwelling accords strongly with the emergent and naturalistic ontology of critical realism. As such, it provides a particularly productive basis from which to critique a range of other perspectives on learning (such as self-directed learning, transformative learning, and learning in communities of practice) promoted in the adult education literature.

Keywords

adult learning, Tim Ingold, critical realism, practice-based theories of learning, Margaret Archer, communities of practice

Introduction

Over the past few years, I have found, perhaps rather atypically for an adult educator, that anthropology has much to contribute to our understanding of human learning processes. The work of Tim Ingold, a British anthropologist, has been particularly illumin-

ating for me of late. At one point, for instance, Ingold (2000) relates how he has experienced a 'sea change' in his thinking over the past few years about the ways humans inhabit the world (p. 172). Whereas he once viewed the interrelationships between humans and their environment from what he calls a 'building perspective', increasingly he has viewed these interrelationships from a 'dwelling perspective' (p. 172). Inspired by Ingold's thoughtfulness, I too have tried to view the ways humans are in the world from a dwelling perspective, and, as a consequence, have experienced a sea change in my own thinking. I have come to believe, in fact, that the phrase 'learning as dwelling' is a particularly powerful way of characterising human learning processes.

In this article, I suggest that Ingold's notion of the 'building perspective' has much in common with the modernist perspective on learning that still prevails in adult education: what Jean Lave (1990) calls the 'acquisition theory of learning' (p. 309). Both, I argue, are underwritten by what is often described as the Enlightenment ontology of the subject. The dwelling perspective, I suggest, allows us to escape the individualism, objectivism and instrumentalism of this ontology without recourse to unpromising critical strategies taken by many postmodernists. Drawing on theorists such as Margaret Archer (2000), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Michael Tomasello (1999), who, like Ingold, are convinced of 'the primacy of practice' and the value of the dwelling perspective, I flesh out the notion of *learning as dwelling* and discuss how it challenges favoured theories of learning in adult education such as self-directed learning and transformative learning. I also contend that, while Lave and Wenger's (1991) depiction of 'learning as increasing participation in communities of practice' (p. 51) accords with the insight 'that intersubjectivity is the fabric of our social becoming', and that it is 'a generative principle of our identities, our agency and of the societies in which we live' (Crossley, 1996, p. 173), our very power to weave our lives into the fabric of culture hinges on our prior and deeper capacity for dwelling. While our human capacity for entering intersubjectivity and engaging in radically novel forms of social learning is crucial, it is a mistake to assume that social learning is the only way we weave ourselves into the world. Our capacities for social agency arise from, extend, but never abandon our more pervasive human power for learning as dwelling.

The building perspective

What from the very first distinguishes the most incompetent architect from the best of bees is that the architect has built a cell in his head before he constructs it in wax.

Karl Marx, Capital

In *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (2000), Tim Ingold explores the common notion that the thing that distinguishes humans from animals is our capacity to 'build'. As Marx observes in the above quotation, unlike animals, who are fully immersed in the objective world and, as a consequence, react to it deterministically, it is the widely held view that human beings are capable of agency – that is, of 'a self-conscious decision process – and intentional selection of ideas' (Ingold, 2000, p. 175). When beavers build a dam or lodge, for example, they do not do so in a mindful way. As Richard Dawkins (2004) relates, 'dam-building behaviour is a complicated stereotypy, built into the brain like a fine-tuned clockwork mechanism' (p. 160). Dawkins suggests that beaver dams should be considered to be an 'extended

phenotype' that develops through an evolutionary process in precisely the same way as other elements of the beaver's phenotype (p. 158).

Humans, however, are not so constrained by their genes as other building animals like ants, bees, birds or beavers. Even a biological determinist like Dawkins observes that, somehow, around 40,000 years ago, human culture exploded beyond the bounds of what can be accounted for by evolution. For Dawkins, human beings, unlike other animals, are capable of forming representations of the world in their imaginations prior to acting in it and of 'using words referentially as tokens of things that were not immediately present' (p. 35). Rather than seeing humans as submerged in nature, Dawkins imagines a separation between human beings and the world they inhabit such that they must form representations of the world in their minds prior to any significant or meaningful action in it. Thus, the things that humans build are not simply an 'extended phenotype', the unreflective outcome of a clockwork mechanism (p. 158). Rather, our building is the result of our peculiar capacity to imagine possibilities and, based on these, to build our constructions in truly creative and original ways.

Ingold observes that this 'building perspective' on the ways humans inhabit the world pervades the social sciences. In anthropology, for instance, it lies behind the widely held belief that, while nature is an external realm that is the 'source of raw materials and sensations' for human cognition, culture, as Clifford Geertz depicts, is 'the imposition of an arbitrary framework of symbolic meaning upon reality' (Ingold, 2000, p. 178). Culture, in this view, is an edifice of signification and explanation that the human mind builds and lays over external reality. For Ingold, this 'is the essence of the building perspective; that worlds are made before they are lived in; or in other words, that acts of building are preceded by acts of worldmaking' (p. 179).

Perhaps because of its distinguishing interest in understanding the evolution of the specific powers of human beings, anthropology has been plagued by nagging difficulties posed by the building perspective. Chief among these is the origin of our ability to build. If it is true that differentiation between humans and other animals derives from our capacity to imagine our creations in our minds before enacting them in reality, when and how did this attribute first emerge? As Ingold observes, anthropology's search for the 'first hut' has been particularly fraught with difficulties.

For example, each evening, in the forests of Africa, the few remaining wild chimpanzees of the world set about building their nests for the night. With remarkable skill, they fold and weave branches and twigs that are ready at hand into a comfortable and secure concave bed in the crown or fork of a tree or, sometimes, like gorillas do, on the ground (Goodall, 1962). Even though chimpanzees are well established as our closest living relatives, and despite the sophistication of their nightly nest-building activities, Ingold observes that many anthropologists find it difficult to attribute to them the same building capacities possessed by humans. For others who have studied chimpanzees most closely, however, is it difficult not to grant them this human power (Goodall, 1986, 1990). As Ingold observes, the differences between chimpanzees' nests and the minimal shelters built by some groups of hunters and gatherers are so small that it raises doubts about the 'building' line that so many people draw between human beings and other species.

According to Ingold, the difficulty we have with chimpanzee nest-building is symptomatic of far deeper problems in our understanding of humans and the world. Our usual tack when confronted with a difficult-to-categorise phenomenon like chimpanzee nest-building is to try to relegate it to one side of the human/world dichotomy or

the other. In Ingold's view, however, resolving this and other difficulties requires a far more radical approach. Echoing Habermas's (1984) contention that any viable critical theory of society must escape the bounds of 'the philosophy of consciousness' (p. 386), Ingold (2000) claims that understanding chimpanzee nests 'requires nothing less than the dissolution of the dichotomy which in modern scholarship separates the biological sciences from the humanities, between evolution and history, or between the temporal processes of nature and culture' (p. 185).

The 'acquisition theory of learning'

There are strong similarities between what Ingold describes as the building perspective and the ways most educators view human learning. For the most part, educators take for granted what Jean Lave (1990) calls the 'acquisition' theory of learning, a theory that 'establishes a sharp dichotomy between inside and outside, suggests that knowledge is largely cerebral, and takes the individual as the unproblematic unit of analysis' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 47). Just as with the building perspective, educators normally regard thinking to be a process that transpires in the heads of individual people, the mind posited as irrevocably separate from the objective world. Whereas the building perspective focuses on the building actions of this thinking mind, the acquisition theory focuses on the ways knowledge gets into the mind. Learning in this scheme is conceptualised broadly as a process by which the mind forms accurate representations of entities and events in the objective world. Once internalised, these representations (knowledge) provide the basis for rational reflection and subsequently for effective action (like building) by the subject in the world.

The acquisition theory of learning reinforces the view that a context-free body of objective knowledge actually exists in the world and that the propositions of this body of knowledge can either be directly transmitted to and internalised by individual learners or, in more problem-based approaches, internalised by learners as they encounter and explore their environment. In either case, in the acquisition theory of learning the educator plays a central role as someone who manages the learner's exposure to new knowledge to maximise the efficiency of its acquisition. Whereas valuable learning is seen to take place in formal contexts where experts guide learners to internalise better facts and values, learning that occurs outside the formal educational context beyond the control of the educator is often viewed with suspicion, as it has not been scrutinised for its accuracy or its objectivity.

As Jean Lave (1996) relates, the acquisition theory of learning suggests that thinking persons are separate and isolated from nature and from each other and, thus, are obligated to form hypotheses about the world based on information received through (rather untrustworthy) sense organs and organised, internally, according to cognitive schema. The acquisition theory of learning is 'deeply concerned with individual difference, with notions of better and worse, more and less learning, and with comparison of these things across groups of individuals' (p. 149). In this theory, the specific characteristics of the learner determine their power to learn. In league with scores of cognitive psychologists and other investigators convinced of the acquisition theory of learning, educators approach the learner as an entity to be dissected, analysed, labelled and diagnosed. In order to better predict and control learning outcomes and to adjust learning strategies to make up for inborn quirks or deficits possessed by the learner, educators work hard to develop accurate knowledge of the general and varying characteristics of

different learners. As numerous critics of the acquisition theory of learning in adult education have pointed out, it encourages the educator to view the learner instrumentally as something to be controlled and, even more importantly, to view themselves as experts legitimately positioned to do the controlling.

Much like Ingold, who contends that problems with the building perspective are the result of deeper problems with ontological suppositions we make about the ways humans inhabit the world, Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that the problems we have with the acquisition theory of learning 'are based on fundamental assumptions [we make] about the person, the world, and their relations' (p. 47). To escape what Lave (1996) regards as the politically unacceptable implications of the acquisition theory of learning of blaming individual people for their failure to learn, Lave and Wenger argue that the individualistic and overly cognitive view of human learning as a process of acquiring knowledge must be abandoned. Instead, they suggest that human learning be conceived in terms of a social theory of practice.

As I relate below, although this recommendation does indeed have much promise, it overextends the social dimensions of human learning to occlude important non-social elements. Ingold, on the other hand, provides the basis for expanding Lave and Wenger's theory of learning as participation in communities of practice. The phrase 'learning as dwelling', I argue, more adequately captures this expanded conception of human learning.

Modernity's man/society's being

Underlying both the building perspective and the acquisition theory of learning is the Enlightenment conception of what Margaret Archer (2000) calls 'Modernity's Man'. Even though the basic elements of this conception have been well explored in relation to the theories and practices of adult education (Bagnall, 1999; Edwards and Usher, 2001; Hemphill, 2001; Leicester, 2000; Pietrykowski, 1996; Usher, 1989; Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997), it is useful at this point to describe the main characteristics of 'Modernity's Man' and then to recount prevalent postmodern critiques of this Enlightenment notion. This will set the scene for introducing Ingold's suggestion of the dwelling perspective as a promising alternative to postmodern critiques of 'Modernity's Man'.

In Margaret Archer's (2000) assessment, the ontology that has long prevailed in the social sciences conceives 'Modernity's Man' as a consciousness set over and against an external reality and posits Nature as existing for Man as a context to be understood and controlled for his own benefit. According to this account, the only conceivable relationship between human beings and the world is one of instrumental reason and action in which humans strive to acquire accurate and objective representations (knowledge) of the workings of the external world and, with these in hand, to assert rational control of this world to serve their interests. Moreover, as Archer relates, 'Not only does this self stand outside nature as its master, it also stands outside history as the lone individual whose relations with others are not in any way constitutive of the self, but are merely contingent accretions, detachable from our essence' (p. 23). Thus, the core features of the human being as a consciousness capable of reason are not the result of the person's encounter with the world. Rather, they are the pre-given grounds for humanity's very engagement with and mastery of the world. As Ingold (2000) observes, this view 'takes as given the separation of the cultural imagination from the material world, and thus presupposes the existence, at their interface, a surface to be

transformed' (p. 347). In Archer's (2000) words, 'Because all that is contingent can be stripped from this self, it can step forward as a purely logocentric being whose consciousness, freed from any embedding in historical circumstances, can pellucidly articulate the cosmic story' (p. 23).

For the proponents of this vision, while rational consciousness is the essence of human beings, ignorance, suspicion and emotion very often stand in the way of this true nature and distort the knowledge they have of the world. It is only through the disciplined practices of objective observation and reasoning that the rational consciousness realises its fullest potential. A central concern of 'enlightened' thinkers throughout modernity has been to purify reason by overcoming the distorting influences of human emotion and escaping the irrational and convoluted strictures of traditional world-views. Only by separating hard and objective facts from soft and subjective values can real and unsentimental human progress be achieved. Education, in this scheme, is seen as an important context within which people can develop the capacities to acquire empirically founded representations of the world (knowledge), to reason impartially and objectively, and to act with cool purpose and effectiveness.

While the Enlightenment account of humans and the world still holds sway throughout the social sciences and while the triumphal and exuberant belief in modernity still runs strong in Western societies, over the past decades, 'Modernity's Man' has been subject to trenchant critique by postmodernists. As Andrew Sayer (2000) observes, however, when faced with untenable dualist positions such as blatant and naïve objectivism and empiricism, 'it is tempting to counter them by reversing or inverting them' (p. 67), in this case by adopting the stance of relativism, anti-essentialism and idealism. This, Sayer argues, is exactly what has often happened under the banner of what he identifies as 'defeatist postmodernism' (p. 67). Thus, rather than heralding human beings as rational agents who hold sway over an external reality, many postmodern critics dismiss the whole metanarrative of objective, enlightened reason as a grand delusion. The human mind, they contend, does not exist, to use Richard Rorty's (1979) words, as a 'mirror of nature' that unproblematically reflects the objective truth of the external world. Rather, humans are completely and inescapably immersed in language which governs their experience and shapes all of their thoughts and actions. Rejecting the claim that it is possible to step outside our linguistic horizons, postmodernists argue that the Enlightenment notion that we have unproblematic access to truth is an illusion. Instead of being generated by an autonomous and rational mind, postmodernists contend that meaning is generated by the play of social forces that shape the linguistic horizons within which each human finds her or himself. Human beings are not simply a rational and unchanging essence. They are constituted in the particular configuration of social texts that they encounter at their specific cultural location. Thus, instead of considering humans to be 'Modernity's Man', originators and masters of the world, the negative postmodernists reverse the equation and posit that humans are what Margaret Archer (2000) calls 'Society's Being', contingent constructions of local social and cultural forces (p. 86).

According to Archer, however, this 'revulsive reversal' of the ontology of the Enlightenment, which substitutes the naïve objectivism of 'Modernity's Man' with the anti-realism, relativism and constructivism of 'Society's Being', fails, in the end, to overcome the dualist notion of humans in the world that has predominated throughout modern times (p. 25). Instead of humans being the masters of and creators of society, after the reversal they become the contingent products of social discourses. While proponents of

'Modernity's Man' oversimplify the relationship between humans and the world through, what Archer terms, 'upwards conflation', asserting that individual, rational humans constitute the social world, proponents of Society's Being oversimplify through 'downwards conflation' asserting that the person is constituted within society by discourses (p. 86). Particularly alarming for Archer is that, in their effort to escape the strong essentialisms of the Enlightenment view of the human as rational agent, defeatist postmodernists deny that human beings have any specific, real or appreciable powers other than those that are 'the gift of society' (p. 86). As Archer notes, 'because post-modernism not only asserts the primacy of (linguistic) structure over human agency, it ultimately seeks to dissolve the human subject entirely' (p. 25). This anti-humanism, she argues, is extremely dangerous, for 'There can be no inalienable rights to human status where humanity itself is held to be a derivative social gift' (p. 124). The idealism and relativism of the postmodern position deprives social critics of any realist basis for asserting inviolable human rights. While it is important, she maintains, to dispel the illusions of modernity's conception of Man, the critical path of defeatist postmodernism is both unnecessary and dangerous.

Given the deep entwinement of the theories and practices of adult education with the project of modernity, it is not surprising that, over the past few decades, it has undergone strong critical scrutiny by postmodernists to the point that Kenneth Wain (2000) can reasonably assert that 'the discourse on education is itself today in a postmodern condition; in a state of crisis and at a point of exit from the discourse of the modern' (p. 37). While a detailed examination of postmodernist criticism in adult education is beyond the scope of this article, it is useful to point out, at least, the different ways postmodern sensibilities can be seen to be present in the field. In this case, critical realist Andrew Sayer provides a helpful framework for identifying this presence.

Sayer (2000) observes that the postmodern reversal of the modernist worldview takes place in three major ways (he calls these 'three pomo flips'), each of which, I suggest, are fully present in adult education. The first 'pomo flip' he describes is from the foundationalism of the Enlightenment ontology to the idealism/relativism/textualism of postmodernism. Careful herself to avoid endorsing a strong relativistic position, Mal Leicester (2000) affirms that the critical position of postmodernism that 'truths are to be located in particular socio-cultural contexts; there is no transcendent or Archimedean vantage point outside of such locatedness' (p. 74) is influential in the field of adult education. This observation is supported by Edwards and Usher (2001), who comment that 'Incredulity and doubt are widespread, encompassing a questioning of any foundation or authorizing center and thus a skepticism that certain kinds of knowledge have canonical status' (p. 278). The influence of anti-foundationalism in the field can be seen, for instance, in the ease with which commentators assert that knowledge is 'an inter-subjective social construction formed through continual encounters with all forms of discourse' (Kaufmann, 2001, p. 3).

The second pomo flip described by Sayer is from the euphoric, grand and totalising metanarratives of Man's progress in modernity to small, local and differentiated knowledges and narratives. Again, evidence for this flip is widely present in the adult education literature. For example, reflecting on the impact of postmodernism on radical adult education, Leicester (2000) observes how 'in problematizing grand narrative, grand emancipatory projects are also undermined by postmodernism. The radical adult educator's understanding of education as social action must become more localized and contextual in nature' (p. 78). Likewise, Kilgore (2004) observes how, due to the recon-

figuration of postmodernism, 'there is no longer anything grand or universal to know and that the teacher's authority to know only exists within an authority-granting institution' (p. 47). Whereas in the late 1970s it would have been difficult to assert the value of research in adult education that did not contribute to producing or reinforcing generalisable knowledge, now the field is replete with studies that spurn grand theorising and focus on exploring local, contextual and situated knowledges. As Richard Bagnall (1999) relates, education in 'postmodernity is concerned with situating learning in particular contexts... Learning is recognized as being fragmented and of limited transferability or generalizability across contexts or discourses' (p. 79).

The third flip identified by Sayer occurs when postmodernists reject the Eurocentrism, ethnocentrism and androcentrism of earlier modernist perspectives and adopt a relativistic view of culture. In reaction to previous (and probably still prevailing) beliefs that naïvely assume the superiority of Western culture, postmodernists flip and refuse not only to privilege modern culture but to grant *any* basis from which members of one culture can contest the truth claims of members of another culture. Instances of this liberal and politically correct pomo flip so fully pervade the theories and practices of adult education that it is counterproductive to single out specific examples. Rather, in this case, it is perhaps better to note how rare counterexamples are of people willing to reject ethnocentrism without asserting a cultural relativism. For example, Brookfield's (2003) willingness to refuse to make the flip for the sake of political correctness, to retain his critical sensibilities, and to respect the claims of Afrocentric theory enough to have confidence that it can withstand his serious scrutiny, stands out as being both courageous and respectful. As Sayer (2000) notes, 'It is one thing to grant respect to the knowledge of others, but quite another to grant them immunity from external criticism' (p. 76).

In the end, the path of the negative postmodernists results in an untenable relativism that affords little purchase for a non-foundational, substantial practice of adult education. According to Archer (2000), however, postmodernism is not the only way to counter the foundationalism, essentialism and ethnocentrism of 'Modernity's Man'. Another path lies open, she contends, that refuses to hold our humanity to be either completely pre-given or completely socially derivative. This path, she describes, 'construes our humanity as the crucial emergent property of our species, which develops through practical action in the world' (p. 50). For Archer, humans acquire their non-foundational powers through our practical engagement with the world, a process of intertwining that privileges neither agency nor structure (neither the rational subject nor the constituting social context). Tim Ingold insists that it is just such a practical engagement that comes into view when we adopt the dwelling perspective.

The dwelling perspective

Ingold's shift from the building perspective to the dwelling perspective entails viewing the relations between humans and the world in a very different way from both Enlightenment modernists and negative postmodernists. To help achieve this shift, Ingold consults one of the great thinkers of the twentieth century, Martin Heidegger. In his essay, 'Building, dwelling, thinking' (1971), Heidegger ponders the relationship between building and dwelling. He observes that, according to our normal habit of thinking, we think of building and dwelling as two separate but related activities. We imagine that 'we

attain to dwelling, so it seems, only by means of building' (1971, p. 145). A building, in this sense, is a container we construct within which to dwell. In this view, dwelling occurs only after we have acted on the world to build. But Heidegger is uncomfortable with this conception.

To help articulate his concern, Heidegger investigates the etymology of the word to build. The verb to build, Heidegger observes, derives from the Old English and High German word *buan*, a word originally meaning 'to dwell'. While this original meaning of the word is now all but lost, it still forms the root of English words like 'neighbour' (one who dwells nearby). According to Heidegger, in its original usage, *buan* referred not just to one aspect of life, but it pointed much more broadly to how one lives or dwells in one's life. As he notes, this deeper meaning of *buan* is revealed in the common root it has to other old words like *being*.

Over time, Heidegger relates, the meaning of the word *buan* began to contract to designate a much more specific relation between humans and the world than suggested by the notion of dwelling. Instead of pointing to how humans dwell in the world, *buan* began to suggest ways in which humans act upon the world to shape it, to put their stamp on it, to raise up edifices upon it. Only in this latter sense did the word *buan* come to mean 'to build'. For Heidegger, the loss of all but this last sense of the word, the shortening of the meaning of *buan* into build, paralleled a deeper shift in the whole outlook of the Western world from one in which the *process* of dwelling encompassed the act of building to one in which the *form* of building preceded the act of dwelling. While it might be argued that this shift in meaning does not really count for much, Heidegger contends that 'something decisive is concealed in it, namely, dwelling is not experienced as man's being; dwelling is never thought of as the basic character of human being' (p. 148).

This insight, Ingold insists, is crucial. Instead of an ontology in which the rational subject is set against an objective world, Heidegger offers an ontology of engagement in which the person already dwells in the world. Thinking and doing are not two dichotomous aspects of being; thinking is already a kind of doing. Thus, for Heidegger (1971), 'we do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, this is because we are dwellers' (p. 148)... 'To build is in itself already to dwell' (p. 146)... '*Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build*' (p. 160). According to Ingold (2000), 'what this means is that the forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement in their surroundings' (p. 186). We do not export our plans into the world we build. Rather, imagining what one might build is only possible because we already dwell in the world.

To further sharpen this basic shift in thinking from building to dwelling, Ingold (2000) conducts a series of explorations into the ways humans relate to their environment. In one instance, he investigates the practice of basket weaving. According to the standard 'building' view, when a person builds a basket, he or she acts on the world to shape it into a form that is consistent with an image of the basket held in the imagination. This view 'takes as given the separation of the cultural imagination from the material world, and thus presupposes the existence, at their interface, of a surface to be transformed' (p. 347). The basket comes to form when the person, through strenuous force and often with the use of tools, moulds this surface to a shape that matches the form held in the mind. The world, in this view, is passive stuff that can be bent to the will of the knowledgeable and skilled weaver/builder.

From the dwelling perspective, a very different account of basket weaving is possible. Rather than being separate from the world, Ingold describes human beings as being fully entangled in and practically and sensuously engaged with the world. The form of the basket, he observes, arises not according to the will of the maker but as the consequence of a 'morphogenetic' process that takes place when people dwelling in the world, possessing particular skills born from longstanding engagement in practice, interact with very active, resilient and responsive natural materials (p. 344). The process that results in a basket is, in Ingold's view, truly creative 'in the sense that [it] actually *gives rise to the real-world... forms that we encounter*' (p. 345). The knowledge and skill of the weaver do not determine the final shape of the basket. '[T]hey set the parameters of the process but do not prefigure the form' (p. 345).

Ingold's choice of weaving to illustrate how dramatically things change when we adopt a dwelling perspective is very apt. Unlike other instances of building or making (writing, road building or bricklaying, for example) in which there seems to be a much more clearly demarcated surface upon which the maker can impress his or her will, weaving, by its very nature, is a complex, unfolding process in which surfaces are indistinct and obviously resistant. It is not too difficult in the case of weaving to gain a sense of how the basket is the outcome of a 'mutual involvement of people and materials in the environment' (p. 347) and of how it is through dwelling in the world that people find themselves engaged in practices that enmesh them with multifarious materials to weave things like baskets.

With the weaving example at hand, it is easier to appreciate other instances of making, like the building of huts, from the dwelling perspective. From this perspective, the differences between hut-building humans and nest-building chimpanzees are not seen to be due to some foundational, essential, anthropocentric quality we possess and chimpanzees do not. Rather, both human beings and chimpanzees acquire their particular powers as a result of their development in specific, historical/environmental circumstances. The chimpanzee nest arises when, as a consequence of their ongoing engagement in the world, they are entrained by the process of settling down for the night to interact with various materials and forces to weave a nest. The human hut arises, likewise, when, as part of their ongoing engagement in the world, the practice-honed body of a human being becomes part of a larger assemblage of materials and forces to weave a hut. Speaking generally, Ingold (2000) offers this powerful summary observation:

The world of our experience is, indeed, continually and endlessly coming into being around us as we weave. If it has a surface, it is like the surface of the basket: it has no 'inside' or 'outside'. Mind is not above, nor nature below; rather, if we ask where mind is, it is in the weave of the surface itself. And it is within this weave that our projects of making, whatever they may be, are formulated and come to fruition. Only if we are capable of weaving, only then can we make. (p. 348)

The building perspective has us focus on the final products of our making. It is an entifying and objectifying point of view. The dwelling perspective, conversely, has us focus on the ongoing processes of existence that catch us in their thrall at our very conception (and even before). It is a developmental, dialectical point of view. It turns our attention to the processes that shape the 'temporal interweaving of our lives with one another and with the manifold constituents of our environment' (p. 348), producing artefacts (themselves less essential things than unfolding temporal processes) along the way.

The primacy of practice

While it is fairly obvious how the dwelling perspective avoids the upward conflation of the building perspective, it is important to note the ways the dwelling perspective also avoids the downward conflation of negative postmodernism. While this is not an explicit concern for Ingold, it is a key consideration for Archer.

According to Archer (2000), whereas postmodernists insist that it is only through their immersion in social relations that humans acquire a sense of self, within the dwelling perspective, humans first gain a sense of self through their dwelling in the world, that is, through their primal practical engagement as embodied beings with their world. Importantly, this means that key powers possessed by humans develop prior to our entrance into the social world of language. Human beings, Archer insists, are not substantially a gift of society. Our sense of ourselves and our world is not simply or exclusively constituted in discourse. Rather, our sense of self and our most important powers only emerge through practice, as we entwine our bodies into the multiple threads of our natural and social worlds. For Archer, it is imperative to resist the post-modern primacy of language. Rather than seeing language as forming an inescapable discursive horizon, Archer suggests that 'words are quite literally deeds, and ones which do not enjoy hegemony over our other doings in the emergence of our sense of self' (p. 121).

To further clarify the ways the non-foundational powers of human beings emerge and develop as a necessary outcome of their interactions with their environment, Archer draws upon ideas of French phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Very critical, himself, of the subject/object dualism of Descartes' rationalist ontology, Merleau-Ponty (1962) explores how our sense of self progressively develops as a consequence of our bodily confrontation with the world. Consciousness, for Merleau-Ponty, gradually emerges as the embodied human infant perceives and acts in the world. Through practical action, the infant learns of the differences between its own body and the larger world. Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty and O'Neill, 1974) notes that, while the infant finds that its body 'is a thing among things ... because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself' (p. 284). As the child engages with the world, it learns about the powers and limitations, the extent and edges, of its own body envelope, and it learns about the nature and extent of its surrounding environment that is 'given as a correlate of its own activities' (Archer, 2000, p. 129).

As Archer (2000) emphasises, for Merleau-Ponty, our practical engagement with the world does not provide us with an articulate grasp of the world in the form 'I think that' (p. 132). Rather, it provides an inarticulate practical grasp of the world in the form 'I know how' that is independent from language or even, perhaps, from any real realisation of the difference between human beings and other objects in their environment. It is only when humans begin to interlink their lives with other people and begin to recognise that other people, too, are engaged in embodied practice, that they first discover each other's consciousness. For Michael Tomasello (1999), the emergence of this capacity to recognise the other as an incarnate, intentional being is incredibly significant as it enables humans to attune their perceptions and their actions with each other in powerful ways. It is only when they achieve this key capacity, moreover, that representational language becomes possible. Consistent with this insistence on the primacy of practice, Merleau-Ponty emphasises how, when it finally (and rather belatedly) develops, language, itself, remains a form of bodily engagement in the world. Thus, as

Margaret Archer (2000) summarises, for Merleau-Ponty, 'Language is thus an emergent stratum of meaning, whose genesis comes from our natural relations, but it never severs its links with them, since both its acquisition and deployment remain matters of doing' (p. 136).

Whereas, for many postmodernists, our knowledge of the world and of ourselves is constituted within and limited by the linguistic horizons of our social world, for Archer and others, our primal experience of dwelling in the world provides us with a sense of self unmediated by language. What we know is not limited to what we can express. Rather, our sense of both ourselves and our world comes from our active and intentional entwinement in the unfolding processes of existence. Even though, from the dwelling perspective, we cannot claim, as naïve realists might, to have an unfettered and Archimedean knowledge of objective reality, we are not left, as negative postmodernists insist, with no unmediated knowledge of reality at all. Rather, to the extent that we engage with the world and participate in truly creative interrelationships with various materials in our environment, we learn much about reality. Like good basket-makers, we learn to attune our skills and sensibilities to the forces and powers of our material and social world. As we weave ourselves into existence, we detect when our thoughts, our words, our movements, and other deeds run against the grain of the world demanding recalibration and adjustment, just like the skilled basket-weaver plays with the tensile pressure of the fibres to enable the resilient form of the basket to be generated. The dwelling perspective affords a non-foundational, yet realistic, sense of the world.

While it admits that humans have no direct knowledge of the workings of the world, the dwelling perspective also rejects the view that we have no means, other than through language, of discerning when our engagement with the world is out of tune. The very fact that our thoughts, words, narratives, gestures, actions and other deeds can fail us, that they can result in stubbed toes, hurt feelings, miscalculations and incongruities, suggests that it is not just in discourse that we learn about the world. We interlace our bodies with the materials of the world to form creative, generative assemblages, and when these fail, we recalibrate our practices to suit the way of things. Although we cannot attain direct, unchangeable or infallible knowledge of reality, reality still exists, and we can engage in practices more or less fitting to its properties. As Archer (2000) relates, in the dwelling perspective, 'We thus recognize both our fallibility, but also the productivity of fallibilism in the generation of knowledge' (p. 145).

It is important to note that insisting on the primacy of practice in no way amounts to denying, somehow, that human beings are intensely social beings deeply enwrapped in discourse. According to Nick Crossley (1996), our intense social interconnectivity, which he describes as intersubjectivity, 'is key to understanding human life in both its personal and its societal forms... And it is something which we cannot step out of. No amount of methodological procedure, either philosophical or social scientific, can negate or bracket it out. We are intersubjects' (p. 173). Archer (2000) insists, however, that 'society does indeed contribute "something" rather than "nothing" to making us what we are, but that this "something" falls a good deal short of that "everything", which would make all that we are a gift of society' (p. 253). What is important here is that we understand discourse itself as one of many different of practices in which we engage as human beings and that it does not encompass all of what we know or what we are. Moreover, just as people find themselves born into a natural environment that is not of their own making and that has its own properties and powers, people also find themselves thrown into a cultural environment that has been shaped by the interactions of

our forebears. As dwellers, however, our practical engagement with the flows of discursive culture, particularly as we encounter them in what Lave and Wenger (1991) identify as communities of practice, is as creative as our practical engagement with the natural world. As Sayer (2005) explains, because 'all events have several causes and enabling conditions' it is unrealistic to assume that human beings are either completely determined by or completely free to shape their circumstances (p. 192). Rather, the course of life for dwellers is a result of their active engagement in practices that bring together and shape both them and the world they inhabit.

Learning as dwelling

Through dwelling, we bring the emergent, developing capacities of our bodies and the unfolding powers, regularities and unpredictability of nature and society into productive, creative relation. As a consequence of our practical engagement in the world, both we and the world transform. The world of natural and cultural artefacts is diverted by our energies into new patterns that become the environment for subsequent engagements by us and other beings. At the same time, our own bodies are diverted by our practices to develop new patterns and powers that become the basis for future engagements with the world.

Within the parameters laid out by our genetic code, our bodies are plastic enough to adjust, adapt and develop in tune with the demands of our engagements with a complex and dynamically changing environment. Our hands may grow callous or soft, our bodies bulk up or become lean, and our hearts beat slowly or bang in our chests depending on the nature of our relations with the world. As mobile animals, we may also adapt our bodily actions in concert with the flowing processes of the world: duck a low overhang, pick up a spoon, cuddle down in a blanket or squint in bright light. Add to this a neurological system which, again within parameters laid down by our genes, is capable of rapidly growing and changing in myriad ways in response to the specific environmental context in which it develops, and one is left with a creature capable of actively engaging with (not just passively adapting to) the world. Even at the level of our bodies, our engagements at one moment produce changes whose traces both constrain and enable our responsiveness in our next moment of engagement. Our bodies remember what has transpired before and this memory tunes our interactions. In short, for us to be dwellers, for us to be able, at a very minimum, to enter into reciprocal, creative and *developing* relations with the environment, we must be capable of learning. Learning and dwelling are inseparably bound. It is through learning that we dwell; it is through dwelling that we learn.

Our primal powers for dwelling and learning, which we have in common with many other species, are also the basis for a host of other emergent, uniquely human dwelling powers. In particular, as Tomasello (1999) relates, our capacity to see others as dwellers places us in a position to join with them in shared projects of engagement. Our recognition of other people as intentional agents like ourselves gradually enables us to take their view of the world. According to Tomasello (1999), we begin to see that in addition to having 'material affordances', objects that we share with others can have 'intentional affordances' (p. 89). A physical gesture, for example, can accrue meaning that bears little direct relation to the gesture itself. Whereas the memories of our solitary embodied engagements are inscribed in the varied fibres of our bodies, the memories of our joint engagements also leave a trace outside of us, in the memories of other people, in the

artefacts that are woven by our joint interactions, in the chants and rhythms of our shared daily life. Contemporary human beings are born into an environment intensely shaped by previous and ongoing human practices and, as they develop, must weave their own practices into this cultural tapestry. Language is a particularly rich repository of traces which are generated as people engage with each other in negotiating shared practices. As they dwell in the flows of language that swirl and eddy about them, children gain access to a growing set of flexible cultural tools that can help them actively and creatively forge new meanings with others. Even more importantly, however, language constitutes a field within which children develop powers for emotional engagement. As Martha Nussbaum (2001), drawing on psychoanalysts like Melanie Klein (Weiniger, 1992) and Donald Winnicott (1971), makes clear, the very texture of our emotional lives consolidates as we grow and develop in intersubjective contexts. Emotions like anger, jealousy, shame, disgust and love that are so characteristic of our human condition can only emerge as a consequence of our dwelling in culture. Moreover, the more we become encultured the more we become capable of further intensifying our capacities for dwelling in culture.

This depiction of learning as dwelling, in important respects, is consistent with Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of social learning in communities of practice. Rather than depicting learning as a process in which knowledge moves into the heads of people, Lave and Wenger contend that it is much more accurate to view it as a process through which people gradually become part of (attain membership in) a community of practice. A community of practice is a social structure that emerges when human beings participate together in dwelling in the world. As they interlace their social practices, members of a community of practice develop a 'shared history of learning' which becomes the backdrop of future moments of social participation (Wenger, 1999, p. 93). As people dwell inside the boundaries of a community of practice, they negotiate a common sense of the world, develop a sense of their own social identities (including a capacity for emotional connection), forge bonds of solidarity and harmonise their practices. New members entering a community of practice gradually learn to twist the threads of their practices into the dynamically unfolding social practices of the community. The term that Wenger offers to describe this state of entwinement is 'belonging' (p. 209).

While Lave and Wenger's claim that people learn through participation in communities of practice provides a powerful lens through which to understand human learning as a process of dwelling, their contention in their 1991 book that learning transpires in communities of practice unnecessarily restricts what it means to dwell in the world. While it is true that our practices as humans are intensely socially mediated, as Sayer (2005) reminds us:

People are not 'discursively constituted'...but discursively influenced, selectively and fallibly, and a precondition of this influence is that they - unlike logs or fish - are beings which are susceptible to such influence, and it is the specificity of their particular mix of causal powers and susceptibilities which makes the causal efficacy of social influences selective. (p.33)

In significant ways, Lave and Wenger (less so Lave (1988) in her early work but particularly Wenger (1998) in his later work), obscure the 'particular mix of causal powers and susceptibilities' which define who we are as human beings and make us capable, in fact, of attaining membership in communities of practice. It is only through our power

to dwell in the non-social world, of being capable of embodied engagement in practices, that we can even recognise other people as, themselves, being capable of intentional practices. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) reminds us, we recognise others as being like us by their acts of dwelling, that is, by their active engagement in practices. The crucial contribution of Lave and Wenger, particularly of Lave (1988), is not so much that learning is social but that it is as dwellers that we can weave ourselves into the intersubjective contexts of communities of practice. Communities of practice, in short, are structures that emerge *because we are the kinds of dwellers we are*. They are structures which rise up when, through learning, we connect and interweave ourselves into the material and social processes that flow around us throughout our lives. The notion of learning as dwelling enhances our sense of the broader set of powers (of which social interconnection is an important part) we possess as embodied human beings.

While the notion of learning as dwelling accords well, and perhaps even enhances our understanding of learning in communities of practice, it also provides a basis for critiquing favoured notions in adult education. It raises questions, for instance, about premises underlying the idea of self-directed learning. The theory of self-directed learning depicts the adult learner much in the mould of 'Modernity's Man' as an independent, autonomous agent capable of forming accurate and effective representations of the world in his mind. Whereas the notion of learning as dwelling posits learning as a relational process 'stretched over, not divided among - mind, body, activity and culturally organized settings (which include other actors)' (Lave, 1988, p.1), the notion of self-directed learning posits the learner as set apart from and unencumbered by social constraints, particularly the restrictive structures of the traditional, child-centred educational system. Ironically, the liberal notion of the isolated, self-constituting agent affords a deeply impoverished and mistaken view of how autonomous human agency actually emerges and develops in human beings. As Ingold and others help us see, autonomous agency, including our power to learn, depends not on the extent that we are set apart from but on the depth of our entwinement in the varied materials of existence. Our agency as dwellers hinges on our twisting the threads of our own emergent powers into ever broader material and social processes. The notion of 'learning as dwelling', particularly as it is depicted in pedagogical theories as powerful as Lave and Wenger's, calls the entire edifice of self-directed learning into question.

In important respects, the depiction of learning as dwelling also contests the cognitivist premises of transformative learning theory. Largely in line with Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, Jack Mezirow (1991, 1994a) contends that significant and transformative instances of learning take place when the cognitive schemata (basic cognitive structures tailored by experience to process and make sense of experience) that an individual holds in their mind undergo a dramatic phase change in response to an irreconcilable environment (which Mezirow calls a 'disorienting dilemma'). While Mezirow observes that cognitive schemata develop and transform under the influence of a sociocultural matrix (1994b), his fundamental view is that learning entails a cognitive change in the 'head' of the individual learner.

This view is shared by other proponents of transformational learning. For example, Baumgartner (2002), Courtenay, Merriam and Reeves (1998) and Courtenay *et al.* (2000) describe instances of transformational learning reported by HIV-positive individuals. Working from the premise that 'the prospect of death at an early age challenges assumptions and values about the meaning of life' (Courtenay *et al.*, 2000, p. 103), these researchers observe that HIV/AIDS appears to be a powerful stimulus for

stable, long-term, transformational learning in afflicted individuals. Despite Baumgartner's (2002) contention that social interactions play a key role in the transformational learning process in HIV/AIDS individuals, these researchers still follow Mezirow and posit transformational learning as a process that occurs 'in the head' of individuals. In research I conducted into the everyday learning processes of people impacted and affected by HIV/AIDS in Nova Scotia, Canada, however, I found that learning about HIV/AIDS involved far more than cognitive transformations (Plumb, 2005; Plumb and Berringer, 2003a, 2003b). The sudden emergence and proliferation of HIV/AIDS in our region during the 1980s stimulated the rapid emergence and development of an intricate network of communities of practice that responded to the grave challenges of HIV/AIDS with a myriad of complex practices. Certainly, an important part of this response were the transformed identities of individuals impacted by the disease. The great advantage of drawing on the notion of learning as dwelling, however, is that it enables us to understand how, through interlacing our embodied practices with those of other people, we acquire capacities for intersubjective agency that enable us to weave broad social structures capable of addressing even the most terrible of circumstances.

Conclusion

Ingold's recommendation that we aspire to view the world from the dwelling perspective is, I believe, very important for adult education. The dwelling perspective affords a view of learning that escapes the individualism, foundationalism, instrumentalism and objectivism that inhere in the dominant notion of learning as the acquisition of knowledge. In addition, it helps us avoid the idealism, anti-essentialism and relativism of many postmodern critiques of this modernist conception of learning. Conceiving of learning as dwelling places us in a position to understand how our primal human powers as dwellers in a natural world can give rise to emergent powers as dwellers capable of interlacing our embodied practices with others to generate powerful social structures like communities of practice and, over great lengths of time, larger, more expansive, often deeply inequitable social structures (organisations, cities, etc). Then, drawing on the work of social theorists and philosophers who hold a similar relational, dialectical view of humans in the world,¹ we might be better positioned to develop a non-foundational, constructive adult education practice.

Note

- 1 I am thinking especially here of critical realists like Margaret Archer and Andrew Sayer, but also sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990), whose relational theory of practice has received scant attention in adult education.

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