



Malden

Malcolm Knowles's career in HRD has spanned more than 50 years. Some people call him the "father of adult learning," but to his friends, he's just Malcolm.

By Chip R. Bell and friends

This tribute to Malcolm Knowles is a participative effort by many of his friends. Participation is a Malcolm value! This article is also an experiential expression of Malcolm's impact and contribution. Experiential expression is another Malcolm value!

The timing of this tribute is intentional. Malcolm's new and important book *The Making of an Adult Educator: an Autobiographical Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass) has just been published. Reading it, you can't help but be awed by his massive contribution. The book reveals a person who is foremost a learner—perpetually reflecting, rethinking, and renewing. . . in a word, growing. And, it reflects the consummate mentor—one passionately interested and involved in helping others grow.

Malcolm—the facts

Malcolm is the epitome of authenticity. His realness is part of his educational values—not a hat he wears or a role he plays, but part of who he is. The fact that he is typically referred to just as Malcolm (as one refers to Caruso or Michelangelo) is a peephole into how others experience him. If people refer to him as Dr. or Professor Knowles, it's likely they haven't been with him in person.

Malcolm was born in 1913 in Livingston, Montana, the son of a veterinarian. In 1925 he moved with his family to West Palm Beach, Florida, where he completed public school. He entered Harvard University in 1930. Despite Malcolm's aversion to the intellectual snobbery characteristic of 1930s ivy-leaguers, he graduated from Harvard in 1934 and enrolled in the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Later he went to work as Director of Related Training for the National Youth Administration, a position he held until 1940, when he became Director of Adult Education for the Boston YMCA.

Bell is an independent consultant at 8307 University Executive Park, Suite 200, Charlotte, NC 28213.

Malcolm

Malcolm—His Fans

"Among all the countless people who know Malcolm intimately, my claim to any special distinction is that of seniority. There can be few, if any, of his present colleagues who have known him as long as I have. We go way back together to 1945 when he was still in his Navy uniform and we began that happy collaboration that has survived the years so very well."

Cyril O. Houle, retired University of Chicago professor and Malcolm's major advisor in graduate school.

"Malcolm is the spiritual father of many of us who persist in bringing the ideas of self-management, personal responsibility, and continuous learning for ourselves and others. And, he's a warm, energetic human being who really cares about the people he affects. Even after retirement he continues to explore, learn, and stimulate ideas about effective learning. I treasure his thinking and his friendship. Thank you, Malcolm, for choosing to be a thinker and leader in this field."

Pat McLagan, chief executive officer, McLagan International, St. Paul, Minnesota.

"One of the most memorable experiences I had with Malcolm occurred at a 1975 ASTD senior symposium. Malcolm was the closing speaker, with the help of a microphone strung around his neck (over the ever-present silver and turquoise string tie. . . but I think without the green sport coat. . .).

"Midway through his talk, the microphone string released the mike and dropped. Malcolm exclaimed, "OHMYGOSH!" and grabbed for his waistband thinking his pants were falling down! After the laughter subsided, he made a comment about how much of himself he was revealing that day. I hold onto the humanity of that spontaneous bit of humor and know that if I ever lose my microphone or my pants, I have a wonderful model to follow."

Geoff Bellman, independent consultant, Seattle, Washington.

"Since 1979, we have been conducting a class from George Washington University at the ASTD national conference. The class, almost all graduate students, would meet with us each day of the conference, to process the learning of that day, among other things. At one conference, we invited Malcolm to meet with us. Despite his very busy schedule (because everybody wanted to meet with Malcolm) he agreed to come to our meeting for half an hour.



*Malcolm as a Boy Scout
in 1929*

"The students sat in awe and waited for him to pontificate. Of course, that does not happen with Malcolm! It took just minutes for him to get them involved. Suddenly, it was an hour later! We had to call a break to give him a chance to leave. And, he even stayed during the break to continue talking with students."

Len and Zeace Nadler. Len is a retired professor of HRD, George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

"My early memories of Malcolm go back to 1948. The newly elected president of the NEA Division of Adult Education had attended the first NTL summer laboratory session in 1947 in Bethel. He was so rapturous about his T-group experience there that he decided to make the

national meeting of the division into a three-day T-group laboratory. It was a mad idea because of the time constraints, and because it departed radically from the usual pattern of national meetings, without preparing those attending.

"Most of the T-groups—there were seven or eight—bombed. Mine turned out a success. The members were intrigued with the examination of group processes and wanted more. One of the reasons for that outcome was that Malcolm was a member of my group. He was able to talk about his own behavior in the group and to report his feelings about others' behavior without antagonizing them. He was then the director of adult education at the Metropolitan YMCA in Chicago. I predicted then that Malcolm would become a major national leader in the field."

Ken Benne, founder of NTL, Washington, D.C.

"Malcolm has played and continues to play a significant role in the development of our graduate program in adult education. His conception of the role of the professional adult educator is still being used as a guide in helping graduate students design their graduate plans of work. Further, he introduced us all to the learning contract and self-directed learning. He is our guru in adult education."

Edgar Boone, head of the Department of Adult and Community Education, North Carolina State University.

"Malcolm Knowles set two very high standards for those of us in the training and development field. The first is intellectual. His thirst to know and understand is uncompromising, yet unencumbered with the arrogance and impatience of authority. He is a hard thinker who places truth before pride. He accepts being wrong from time to time as a natural consequence of his seeking.

"That second high standard is even more personal and more exemplary. And, harder to emulate.

I have never seen Malcolm give a questioner short shrift, flash anger at a slow learner, or display a scintilla of star-status ego. He doesn't preen and he doesn't posture, and that makes him a double delight to be around—as so many have learned. Malcolm Knowles's real message is Malcolm Knowles. He IS what he preaches."

Ron Zemke, president, Performance Research Associates Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota.

"When you get to know Malcolm you come to realize that teaching is really secondary. What's primary is the facilitation of adults learning as much as possible from each other in as many different ways as possible. It is interesting to notice that virtually everyone who takes Malcolm's ideas to heart is made into an adult educator, in addition to anything else they may want to be. There is real magic in that."

John Ingalls, president, Competency Development Corporation, Boston, Massachusetts.



Malcolm + family during navy years

"Malcolm had a profound effect on my life. I began my doctoral program at Boston University in my late 40s. In many ways, I felt insecure in the presence of younger students. Malcolm immediately made me feel

at ease; under his personal and educational guidance, I experienced joy, enthusiasm, and the unfolding that is the result of engagement in a stimulating and humanly-focused learning experience."

Sister Margaret Ahl, dean at the Sisters School of Nursing, Buffalo, New York.

"Malcolm made a great difference in me as an educator. Because of his influence, I began to really come to grips with what I believed about learning and teaching. He was the first educator I had experienced who consciously and deliberately acted on a commitment to learning theory. As a manager/trainer/consultant, I operate with Malcolm's influence—his style, his compassion, his commitment, and his vision enmeshed in my own."

Ernest Tompkins, director of training and development, City of Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

"Malcolm and I were colleagues at Boston University. I will never forget the Saturday morning when I had clam chowder with Malcolm and Hulda at their home in Newton Highlands. Our years at BU were great! I learned more during that time than ever in grad school. My professional and personal life has been shaped by my relationship with Malcolm and Hulda."

Eugene DuBois, a professor at Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts.

"Malcolm's theories and teaching have touched us all in our efforts at Aetna's Institute for Corporate Education. He taught us to treat everyone as equals, to be yourself, to make those you are helping learn to feel at home, and that there is nothing wrong in having fun while you are learning."

Ira Mozille, director, Aetna Institute, Hartford, Connecticut.

"Malcolm opened the window and door of opportunity to me into the fields of adult education, training, and human resources de-

velopment. He revolutionized my thinking and provided a beneficial andragogical teaching model in helping adults learn. I owe much to him if I have been able to accomplish anything in our field."

John Henschke, chair, Educational Studies Department, University of Missouri.



At Harvard in the 1930's

M is for the Many words of encouragement you gave during dissertation time;

A is for your Always-present smile; L is for your Lifelong dedication to andragogy;

C is for the Care you take in responding thoughtfully to communication;

O is for the Open manner in which you conducted our program;

L is for the Long hours you work each day to be the productive person you are;

M is for the Many times you returned phone calls and eased a present worry.

Dorothy L. Sexton, then a graduate student at Boston University.

Many things I've always felt About people and their Learning

Came into focus Only through the Living experience of Malcolm.

Sister Elaine Des Rosiers, then a graduate student at Boston University.

Learning To Be Authentic

By Malcolm S. Knowles

Adapted from Knowles's new book, The Making of an Adult Educator, with permission from Jossey-Bass.

During my graduate studies at the University of Chicago, when I was strongly under the influence of Carl Rogers and his associate Arthur Shedlin, I was exposed to the concept of behaving authentically. In fact, I found Roger's three characteristics of the effective helper to be fundamental:

- unqualified positive regard for the helpee;
- a deep ability to empathize;
- authenticity—to behave out of your real personhood rather than out of some role.

I began reflecting that while I was the director of training of the National Youth Administration of Massachusetts, I frequently behaved as an agent of the government and justified my actions as being required by governmental policies and standards. As the director of adult education of the YMCAs of Boston, Detroit, and Chicago, I frequently behaved as the agent of a Christian Association and took stands that I really didn't believe in.

I also recalled that when I was the executive director of the Adult Education Association of the U.S.A., I was terribly impressed with Ronald Lippitt's self-assurance and brilliance, with Kenneth Benne's philosophical approach to things, and with Alvin Zander's absolute artistry with large meetings. I tried to be like them and fell flat on my face because people didn't respond to me the way they did to them.

Toward the end of my tenure with the AEA it began to dawn on me that I had some unique strengths that were different from theirs. My special strength was that I was an experienced practitioner; they were scholars. I found myself feeling so much more secure—and authentic—when I presented myself and acted as a practitioner.

When, in 1959, I learned that I had been appointed associate professor of education at Boston University starting in 1960, I announced this good news to one of my professors at the University of Chicago. He told me I couldn't go

around being warm and friendly and putting my arm around people; I had to become dignified, formal, reserved, and authoritative. Over coffee he elaborated on how to play the role of professor.

During my first year at Boston University I tried playing this role, and I was miserable. I felt phony. My self-concept was that of a warm, tender, loving, student-centered person rather than a stuffy professor.

At the end of the year I toyed with the idea of resigning and going back into voluntary association administration, where I could be natural. But I decided to stay a second year and see what I could get away with by being myself.

I started establishing warm relations with students, being supportive rather than judgmental, facilitating their active participation in planning and conducting learning experiences, and even involving them in evaluating themselves. I found that I could get away with almost anything I wanted to do, as long as I limited it to my classroom. I decided I could be a good professor while being myself—with very few compromises—and decided to stay on.

But I was having trouble performing my role of doctoral adviser that way. My eyes were opened to this fact during the beginning of my second year at the university.

One day my first doctoral student to reach the dissertation proposal stage came in with the first draft of a proposal and said, "I'd like to know what you think of this." I read it and responded, "I don't think it will get by the committee." He replied, "I don't care about the committee yet—I want to know what you think of it."

That rocked me back on my heels, as I realized that I was not responding as my authentic self but was playing the role of the chairman of a committee. I read it again and reacted with observations and suggestions, frequently preceded by the phrase "As I see it." His eyes lit up and he said, "Thanks for the help."

Subsequently, I found myself fall-

ing into the same trap with two or three other students, and I decided to do something about it. During the next few interviews with doctoral students I asked a second student to sit in and observe me and give me a sign when he or she detected that I was not being authentic (explaining to the student with the proposal that the second student was observing me, not him or her.) After three such feedback sessions I had overcome that habit.

This personality transformation was reinforced a few weeks later when I was facilitating a course on group and interpersonal relations. After an interesting interaction, I said, "Let's stop the action for a moment and analyze what has just happened. I think you can learn something from it."

One of the students quickly interjected, "Malcolm, what do you want to learn from it?" I was thrown for a loop again, realizing that I was playing the role of "trainer" rather than being a fellow learner, which was what I had announced my role would be at the beginning of the course. So I said, "I would like to see if I can get some clues as to what kinds of statements produce defensive behavior," and off we went pooling our observations about this phenomenon.

I believe that I have not fallen off the authenticity wagon many times since.

I make a point in the opening session of a workshop or course to present myself as a human being rather than an authority figure. I describe the positions I have held, but in terms of the experiences they have provided that might serve as resources for learning.

At the same time, I emphasize that all the other participants in the workshop or course have also had experiences that can serve as resources for learning—and devote the next block of time to finding out what those experiences are. I further urge the participants to call me Malcolm rather than Dr. Knowles or Professor Knowles, explaining that this will help me be an authentic person and help them relate to me as a human being.

When the United States entered World War II in late 1941, Malcolm put his educator skills to use as a communications officer in the U.S. Navy. When he left the Navy in 1946 as a Lieutenant Junior-Grade, he moved to Chicago with his wife Hulda and young son Eric. There he entered graduate school at the University of Chicago while working as director of adult education for the Central YMCA. He completed his M.A. in 1949 and Ph.D. in 1960, and joined the Boston University faculty. In 1974 he became professor of adult education at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, a post he held until his retirement in 1970.

That quick overview of Malcolm's history provides resume facts, but it does little to telegraph his contributions. His books and articles are classics in the field, particularly his 1970 *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* (New York: Association Press) and his 1973 *The Adult Learner: a Neglected Species* (Houston: Gulf Publishing), now in its third edition.

Malcolm served as executive director of the Adult Education Association of the U.S.A. While he did not found the NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Sciences, he was an early pioneer in the field of laboratory education, and was a faculty member in the early 1950s. He served on the faculties of two external degree programs—Nova University and Fielding Institute. In 1985, Malcolm's colleagues selected him to be inducted into the HRD Hall of Fame.

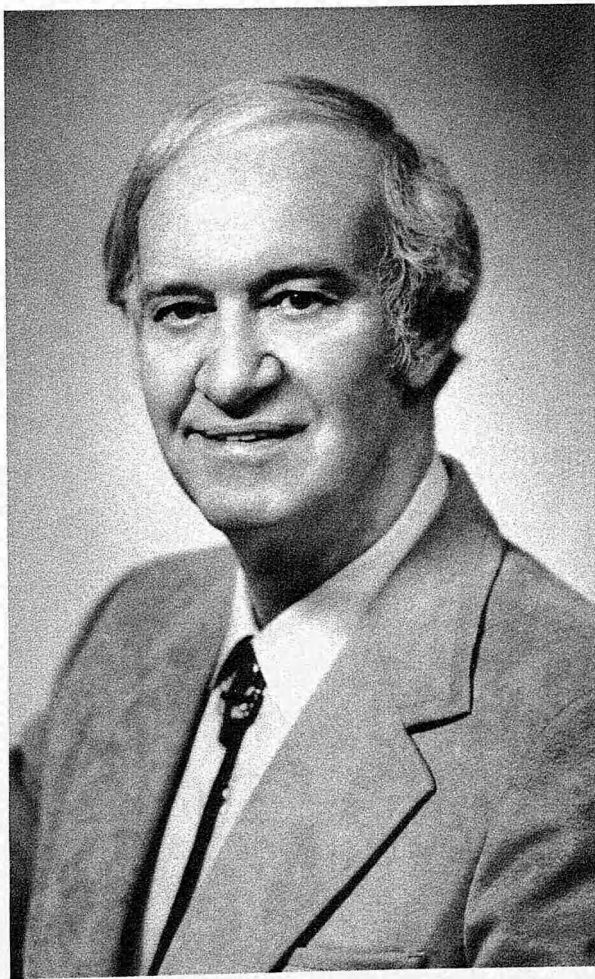
Few know Malcolm professionally without feeling they also know him personally. He continues to live in Raleigh with his wife of 54 years, and pursues an active consulting practice. He has two children—Eric, a professor at the University of Arkansas, and Barbara, a school psychologist in Orange County, California.

For many years he has worn his trademark bolo tie, typically with a turquoise clasp. "He has two real cravats," says his wife Hulda, "for weddings and funerals. But, he started wearing bolos during our visits to the Southwest. He hates fiddling with a tie!"

Malcolm—his work

Malcolm frequently is referred to as the "Father of Adult Learning." He does not relish such a distinction, and those who know him find stereotypical "father" labels—controlling and parental—to have little to do with Malcolm.

He did put the word "andragogy," the art of helping adults learn, into the training vernacular. His impact on the field comes through his prolific and



provocative writings, as well as through those who have studied under Malcolm, mainly at Boston University and North Carolina State. His sessions at such major training gatherings as the ASTD national conference are standing-room-only.

Two major themes run through Malcolm's work—control and discovery. When he first began to be known as the educator who marched to a different drum, most industrial trainers were matching their styles and values to what they had experienced in early public education. The trainer—the teacher—controlled the learners and the learning; participants were seen as dependent, passive, and resistant

to most learning experiences. Trainers were experts who dispensed information the organization deemed relevant and tested participants on their acquisition of what was taught. The pedagogy or child-learning approach dominated the corporate schoolhouse as well as the little red one.

Malcolm preached a different philosophy. He asserted that there would be no learner resistance if participants were learning what they believed they needed, and if the instructor approached the training role as a facilitator, catalyst, and guide ("the pointer-outer," he called it).

If participants were allowed to have control over their own learning in a cooperative, nonauthoritarian, informal arena, their motivation to learn would run high, he said. Participative approaches that offered invitations rather than outlined rules were much more in sync with the idea of the adult as a responsible, independent, and interdependent learner. Training that focused on shared control, relevance, and authenticity would yield participants who not only gained the information they needed to be effective and successful, but, more important, gained the judgment-making competence and confidence that enabled them to be self-reliant.

In addition to revolutionary ideas about trainer control, Malcolm focused on discovery learning—growth through insight and early opportunity for application. Repeatedly, Malcolm witnessed great lectures that yielded little changes in learning.

One cause seemed to be training programs built and conducted around what was to be taught rather than what learners needed to learn. If learners could be active participants—if learners had a way to connect new learning with old wisdom—then understanding, rather than fact retention, would ensue. Much of Malcolm's teachings centered around ways to foster discovery.

Malcolm's learning philosophy was amplified in several books: *Self-Directed Learning* (New York: Association Press, 1975), *Andragogy in Action: Applying Modern Principles of Adult Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984), and *Using Learning Contracts* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986). ■

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