Relationship between Goal Orientations and Educational Methods in Christian Adult Education

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Received 26 November 2007; accepted 16 April 2008

Summary
Christian adult education has various goals and educational methods. From a theoretical perspective the authors’ task is to formulate a relationship between goals and methods. Their distinction between goals is based on whether the authority for Christian identity formation lies ‘outside’ or ‘inside’ the adult learner. The distinction between educational methods is based on the question whether the educator or the learner, or both, directs the learning process. With regard to the direction of the choice between goals and educational methods, this article distinguishes between three possible directions: the choice of a goal orientation leads to the choice of educational methods; the choice of educational methods leads to the choice of a goal orientation; or there is mutual influencing between the two choices. The research shows that adult educators consistently choose the goal orientation of transformation when they opt for the educational methods of experiential and mediated learning. A preference for transformation predicts a preference for mediated and experiential learning, and vice versa. Preference for transformation and the educational methods of experiential and mediated learning is influenced by four characteristics of Christian adult educators. These characteristics yield a consistent profile of educators who are open to pluralism: both in the sense of alternative religiosity, in terms of bringing modern ideas into the church (cultural openness) and not refusing membership to any person who wants to join the church (structural openness), and by rejecting restrictions on the contents and aims of adult education by the church hierarchy (orthodoxy check). The article concludes with a critical reflection on the lack of coherence between the other goals of Christian adult education and educational methods.

Keywords
Christian adult education, pluralism, goal orientations, educational methods, Catholic Church
1 Introduction

In the Netherlands religious and moral education in a Christian framework has assumed diverse forms in recent decades. There is a plurality of both goal orientations and educational methods. Thus some workers operating in this field want their educational activities to promote conformity with the religious teachings of a specific tradition (here the Catholic Church). Others focus their courses on enabling participants to decide for themselves what they want to believe and how to live in accordance with their beliefs. Yet others try to combine conformity and autonomy in Christian adult education. Apart from this plurality of goal orientations there is also a diversity of methods of instruction. Some settle for a learning style in which the educator largely directs the process. Others prefer to base their teaching mainly on participants’ own experience. Again there are various intermediate forms.

This article is not so much about differences in goal orientation and methods as about the interrelationship between the two. The first question is whether there is in fact a relation between choices at the level of goal orientation and methods in religious and moral adult education. The question is important, since the ideal seems to be that there should be at least a logical connection. Theoretically it appears desirable that methods should match goals in educational processes. In reality, however, such coherence of goal orientation and methods does not necessarily exist. Maybe (some) Christian educators have other ‘reasons’ for selecting certain methods. Could it be that they simply ‘do something’ without insisting on systematic coherence? And even if there is a connection, what exactly does it consist in? Does one choose a method because it accords with the goals, or at any rate with the goal orientation? Or the other way round? Or does one choose a particular goal orientation and a particular method for the same reason, but that reason is extraneous to both goals and method?

This last possibility we find particularly interesting in the context of an issue that was part of the motive for this study. That is the issue of religious, worldview-related and moral pluralism, and how one deals with it when it comes to learning in religious and moral adult education in the Netherlands. It could be that educators consider it a good thing and therefore opt for a goal orientation and methods that leave a lot of scope for it or even encourage it. Or they may see it as harmful and strive for uniformity, also when it comes to method. What is the position in the current practice of religious and moral adult education in a Christian framework in the Netherlands?

To gain insight into the relationship between goal orientations and educational methods we conducted research among Christian adult educators in the