

**A Paper Submission for
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Decentring the "Self in Adult Education Practice
by
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Decentring the "Self" in Adult Education Practice
(Theory paper, research completed)

According to Freud, there are three "impossible" professions, three spheres of endeavour that guarantee unsatisfying results, even before engaging in them: educating, healing, and governing. This did not, however, deter Freud from devoting the greater part of his life to healing and educating. Jacques Lacan, if not Freud's most notable, then certainly his most controversial disciple, has argued that Freud, despite such misgivings, believed he could make a positive contribution to the professions of healing and educating because of a discovery whose full impact remains to be felt: the unconscious and its corollary the "decentred subject" It was in marked opposition and stark contrast to the central principle of modern adult education practice—the "self," the modern, "centred" subject—that Freud posited his discovery.

While allusions to the "self" abound in the adult education literature—whether that of assessment, planning, learning, or evaluation—seldom is any thought given to the genesis or meaning of this term, or its relation to the decentred subject of psychoanalysis. Just what is the "self," and what distinguishes this cornerstone of the Western Humanist Tradition—the modern, "centred" subject of consciousness—from the postmodern, "decentred" subject of language that now threatens to displace it? Even more importantly, what are the implications of postmodern pedagogies structured around the notion of the decentred subject for contemporary adult education practices premised on the modern centred subject, or "self?"

The proposed paper will trace the origin of the "self"—the modern, "centred" subject of consciousness—to 17th Century European thought It will draw upon the work of French psychoanalyst/educator, Jacques Lacan, and a number of his commentators—Boothby, Felman, Muller & Richardson, Grosz, and Zizek—to clearly distinguish the modern, "centred" subject of consciousness from the "decentred" subject of language, to explore the implications of the latter for contemporary adult education practices based on the unproblematic transmission of knowledge, and to investigate the revolutionary implications of a psychoanalytic pedagogy structured around the "decentred subject" for the field of adult education.