

Lindenwood College

From the Selected Works of John A. Henschke EdD

2012

**Research on the Use of Learning and Degree
Contracts within University and Other Settings in
Italy and the USA**

John A. Henschke, EdD, *Lindenwood University*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/john_henschke/74/

Research on the Use of Learning and Degree Contracts within University and Other Settings in Italy and the USA

Monica Fedeli, Ph.D. Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Padua, Italy

Mario Giampaolo, Ph.D. Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Padua, Italy

Susan Isenberg, Ph.D. Faculty of the Andragogy Doctoral Program, Lindenwood University,
St. Charles, Missouri, USA

John A. Henschke, Ed.D. Chair, Faculty of the Andragogy Doctoral Program, Lindenwood
University, St. Charles, Missouri, USA

Abstract:

This paper presents some of the benefits of using learning contracts by some in the USA who have used them for many years, and others in Italy who had never used them, but were beginning to experiment with using them. Illustrations of results were provided by colleagues from both countries, comparisons were made between the two, and lessons learned from the experience were shared. There is a very different perspective between using them over a long period of time and just beginning to use them. However, the keenest insight is that they are beneficial at each stage along the way, but in different ways. It is important to acknowledge the benefits of each stage of growth and the long range positive results that accrue in the overall process.

Introduction

Perhaps the conceptual and theoretical roots of contract learning reach back to the foundation and practice of independent study (Dressel and Thompson, 1973), which, in turn, was spurred by the antecedent ideas of andragogy (Kapp, 1833), Comenius in his 17th century *Panpedia* (In Savicevic, 1991; Comenius, 1982) and emerging from ancient times with the Hebrew Prophets, Jesus Christ, the Greek Philosophers, and even Confucius. Dressel and Thompson (1973, p. 1) suggested that independent study was basically premised on the ability of the learner to carry on independent study, alone or with peers being a major goal of education and learning, which they defined as "the student's self-directed pursuit of academic competence in as autonomous a manner as he (or she) is able to exercise at any particular time." This implied that in learners there would be various stages of development regarding the extent to which learners are able to exemplify self-directedness in their learning – in the process they are following and in the subject matter content they are seeking to acquire and internalize (to make their own).

Thus, there have been many folks throughout the centuries that have devoted their energies to learn things they considered valuable and important, as well as discover things of which they were not previously aware. Among some of the approaches they used, a number of them came in contact with the Learning Contract (LC). There are a number of definitions or descriptions. Webster (1991) defines *contract* as, "an agreement between one or more parties for the doing or not doing of something specified" (p. 295-296). Webster (1991) also defines *learning* as,

"knowledge acquired by systematic study in any field of scholarly application" (p. 772). By combining these two definitions we may define *contract learning* as an agreement between a student and institution or faculty member to acquire knowledge systematically either in the classroom or independently. The problem with this definition is that it borders on possessing very legalistic connotations. Many people object or rebel to this and, therefore, many users of learning contracts call them "learning plans", "learning commitments", "study plans", "learning agreements", or "self-development plans" (Knowles, 1986).

Some considered the LC to be a convenient administrative device. Collins (1991) has pointed out that the contractual bargain is often one-sided, with all the obligations being on the side of the student, and none on the part of the teacher. The teacher does not even undertake unequivocally to award a pass mark to the resultant work: she will do so only if in her judgment it meets the required criteria. After all, a learning contract, sometimes may be misconstrued as follows: The teacher undertakes that if the student produces such work as the teacher specifies, to a standard which the teacher will determine (whether or not that standard is based on fixed criteria or personal whim, and regardless of whether the standard is known to the student), the teacher will award a mark to that work. The student indicates acceptance of this 'agreement' by producing the work.

Very simply, the following description could be that learning contracts are agreements between a teacher (or teaching team) and a learner (or occasionally a group of learners). However, Atherton (1991) conceived that a learning contract is a document which a student creates to compare current abilities with desired abilities, and determine the best strategy for bridging the gap between them. The question may be: What do you need to know that you don't already know? The learning contract includes learning objectives, available resources, obstacles and solutions, deadlines, and measurements. Fox (1983) also supports that the learning contract specifies what is to be learned, how it is to be learned and how learning will be verified.

Nonetheless, Knowles (1986) indicated that in his initial half-century (at that time) as an adult education practitioner, he had begged, borrowed, and stolen many ideas and techniques from other educators, with most of them improving his practice. But the ideas and techniques exemplified by the Learning Contract (LC) process made the most difference in what he did and solved the most problems that plagued him as an educator. However, it is curious that he confessed his not knowing from whom he got it. Notwithstanding, the first time Henschke remembers seeing any document where Knowles refers to and uses an LC is in his 1975 book entitled "Self-directed learning: A guide for learners and teachers." And Henschke had already graduated from Boston University with his Doctoral Degree in 1973 and had not heard any reference to the LC during his doctoral work. Moreover, he remembers also hearing Knowles speak about his new Self-directed learning book in 1975, and the fact that he was beginning to use the learning contracts. Knowles mentioned with excitement that he learned about the learning contract from Berte (1975), who posited that learning contracts, though not binding legal documents in the strictly legal sense of contract, are written agreements or commitments reached between a student and a faculty member regarding a particular amount of student work

or learning on the one hand and the amount of institutional reward or credit for this work on the other.

Thus, as Knowles (1986) experimented with the learning contract, developed them in more detail and he found that students began to understand course objectives more clearly, he became committed to them more deeply. He discovered that students and participants with a wide range of differences – learning styles, backgrounds, paces of learning, and other idiosyncrasies – planned strategies and resources that helped learning become individualized and supported a prime characteristic of adulthood which is the need and capacity to be self-directing. He also used them in workshops and groups within educational institutions, corporations, government agencies, professional societies, health agencies, voluntary organizations, religious institutions, and other social systems.

Consequently, Knowles (1975) further discovered that although these institutions impose requirements on their personnel for entrance into the profession or completing their degrees, a learning contract is a way to provide structure to learning and to give a lot of control to the learner over their learning. The learning contract became a means of reconciling imposed requirements from institutions and society with the learners' need to be self-directing. It enables them to blend these requirements in with their own personal goals and objectives, to choose their own ways of achieving them, and measuring their own ways of achieving them. The learning contract thus makes visible the mutual responsibilities of the learner, the worker, the teacher, the facilitator, and the institution (Knowles, 1975).

It was a short time after this experience in 1975 of being exposed to the whole idea of learning contracts that Henschke began using them in various adult education settings and programs with which he became involved. Isenberg became involved in using learning contracts in the early 1990s, during her Master's and Doctoral Program at University of Missouri-St. Louis, where she studied with Henschke. Fedeli and Giampaolo, a faculty member and doctoral student at the University of Padua, Italy, became involved in learning contracts in 2010, as a result of meeting and working with Henschke at the 2010 American Association for Adult and Continuing Education National / International Conference in Clearwater, Florida. Henschke became a sort of mentor to the other three practitioners and researchers involved in writing this paper, especially as it relates to the use of learning contracts. In the remainder of this paper, we will present some of what each of us has done regarding learning contracts, namely our work in progress, a comparison of our various approaches and differences between how we have used them in the USA and Italy, various lessons learned, and how we have helped each other in the process.

Various Uses of the Learning Contracts in Italy and the USA: Work in Progress

Learning Contracts have been and are continuing to be used in the University of Missouri-St. Louis and Lindenwood University in the USA; and, in the University of Padua, Italy. Each one of the authors is at various stages of their development and use of learning contracts. They have been used for various purposes. This is one of the unique benefits of the learning contract in

that they are very flexible in the purpose(s) for which they are used. The order of presentation will be John A. Henschke – during his time with the University of Missouri and Lindenwood University; Susan K. Isenberg – during her time with the University of Missouri, Christian Hospital in Northeast St. Louis, and Lindenwood University; Monica Fedeli – during her time with the University of Padua, Italy; and, Mario Giampaolo – during his time at the University of Padua, Italy. As each one's perspective is presented, it will be as if they are speaking in the first person. This will make it more personal to be able to understand.

John A. Henschke

As a Continuing Education Specialist in the University of Missouri Extension, a Professor of Adult Education with the University of Missouri-St. Louis College of Education, and a Professor and Chair of the Doctoral Emphasis Specialty in Andragogy at Lindenwood University School of Education, St. Charles, Missouri, I applied and used learning contracts in numerous ways. I began using them in 1975 and continue using them until the present time of this writing and will continue during the remainder of my educational career. The structure I most regularly used was Knowles' (1986) five columns as follows: What are you going to learn (objectives), How are you going to learn it (resources and strategies), Time span of when you will learn (schedule), How will you know that you learned what your objectives specified (evidence of accomplishment), and, What standard will be used and who will validate that you learned what you indicated (proving that you learned what you said you would learn)?

I used the Learning Contract (LC) with a small Convent of 50 Roman Catholic Sisters who had not had a new novice enter into the Order in more than a decade. The average age of the sisters was increasing one year each year this continued. They expressed concern that if this pattern continued, their Order would soon 'die-out'. The Superior General and Council worked together with me for 75 days over a period of almost three years, during which each member of the Order developed and used an LC for herself, and the total group developed and implemented a LC for their future. In the process they looked at their past and considered options for their future. The happy result was that they initiated a merger with another Order and successfully came together to form a new Order. They are alive and vibrant today – 32 years later – looking toward a bright future and are receiving new members along with carrying on active contributive ministries.

I engaged the participants in Learning Contracts (LC) as part of an adult education program I conducted with the manager and 15 members of the educational and human resource division of a major corporation serving two US states. They had not received an update on education in about 16 years and requested my university to provide the update. I was selected to address this issue. We worked together for two and one-half years on this project. Each one of the participants became engaged in developing, writing and implementing a learning contract that served their learning needs throughout the duration of the project. The total group along with their manager developed and implemented a learning contract that would help to guide them in assuring that they received and internalized the updating goal. As the time progressed, each person and the team gained the competence that helped them become the most effective

team in the corporation. They were involved in changing the function of the corporation's education division toward performance support. They used to carry on the education of the workers the traditional way of taking them off the line for a week or two and then sending them back to their job with the workers saying "I am glad that is over with; now we can get back to our work and forget all this stuff." As they received and internalized the educational update, they made some changes. They were expressing themselves in a way that made one perceive them as being delighted that they were contributing to their organization and to their community.

The manager of the above group decided to take a Master's Degree in Andragogy to learn how to do what I had been conducting with them during the update. At the end of his degree program he designed and implemented what he wanted to do for his 'capstone / internship' experience. He elected to do the research within his corporation, to analyze all of the current training / educational programs being conducted and determine the time, costs, etc., for them. Then, he used that data, redesigned and recalculated the cost in time, costs, etc., for all of them so that they would be conducted with an Andragogical, self-directed, learning contract approach. Then, he compared the two. His conclusion was that if the new approach were actually implemented in the corporation, in a five year period of time, they would save \$5 million US Dollars. Since he had the data from inside the corporation, he was able to do a thorough analysis.

I worked with a group of educators in which they were trying a different approach in sex education engaging parents and children together in the learning sessions. The fathers and sons participated together in their sessions, with mothers and daughters participating together in their sessions. We conducted the facilitation and implementation of their developing learning contracts and communicating together in such a way that it was family members interacting with each other on matters that they considered important in this regard, rather than us as educators determining the scope of the conversation. The most valuable things that came out of that program were: The communication without embarrassment that family members (parents and children) had with each other on a topic they had not previously considered discussing; and, we kept a record over a five year period of the teen-age pregnancy rate in that community of five counties and compared it with the teen-age pregnancy rate over the same five year period throughout the whole state of Missouri. We found the pregnancy rate in those five counties to be about 60 % less than throughout the whole state of Missouri.

One of the foundational andragogy courses I teach at Lindenwood University (LU) from when we were starting a Doctoral Program in Andragogy is entitled: Foundational Development and Implementation of Learning Contracts with Adult Learners. There were a number of doctoral students already in the leadership development doctoral program, and many who were waiting to get into it when LU would develop an alternative to a K-12 focus. In the learning contract course, the participant's responsibility is to develop and implement a learning contract. Consequently, the first time the Learning Contract course was offered, the class group developed a learning contract on the development of the Doctoral Emphasis Specialty in Andragogy. As a result by the end of the semester, they had developed five initial courses

focused on andragogy, and the Andragogy Doctoral Emphasis Specialty was approved by the Lindenwood University faculty and administration, and was ready to be fully implemented by four weeks into the second semester. In the two and one-half years since the approval we have developed and added seven more courses in the program, with a number of new enrollments into the doctoral program. In addition, the students and faculty meet for one hour each week to discuss the development and direction of the andragogy program focused on addressing the students' needs. To further develop this course on Learning Contracts, we have the students engage in studying what has been previously developed in other universities and settings. There are 89 programs that have used Learning Contracts for various purposes: Business, industry and government; colleges and universities; education for the professions; religious education; elementary and secondary education; remedial education; independent studies; academic classrooms; degree programs; professional and management development; clinical courses; graduate assistantships and internships; and, introducing learning contracts into an organization. We have had almost all of these implemented by students in class presentations and workplaces. I have also had them implemented in other universities where I have worked.

A number of my students have experienced the following through their use of learning contracts.

- 1.** Active engagement of 65 participants in 22 locations using learning contracts on a telephone network, in learning twelve themes of andragogy through a course on advanced methods and techniques of adult education.
- 2.** A Christian School administrator changed the whole focus of the school by engaging the teachers in developing their own learning contracts for their improving what they are teaching. He also is ADHD and Bipolar, with his vomiting prior to previous course sessions when he had to take a test or exam because he was so nervous. Now that he uses a learning contract which eliminates the necessity of tests or exams, he carries forward and completes his academic work responsibly, with no vomiting involved because he is relaxed and not nervous.
- 3.** Various students will break down the subject matter of a course into manageable parts and do a separate learning contract for learning that part of the course. They find this much more helpful to them in the early stages of using a learning contract, rather than trying to encompass the total subject matter of the course in one learning contract.
- 4.** One student was all confused about the function of a learning contract. She was only able to come to part of the class sessions; hence, she was left with the presentation on the beginning purpose and understanding of a learning contract. At first she thought of this as a disadvantage. However, in working her way through for making her presentation, she was able to eliminate all her confusion about learning contracts and get an abundantly clear picture of their benefits. Thus, she was delighted with the outcome of her presentation.
- 5.** One student who works in an investment firm developed her learning contract in which she focused on what the company could do regarding hiring returning veterans from the battlefield in Iraq and Afghanistan. The company embraced her idea and has now hired several hundred veterans and have taken the unusual step of providing them a three-year time frame on full salary to get themselves into the frame of purely commission, instead of the usual commission requirement of new hires. They are finding it working very well and the veterans are moving forward responsibly toward the goal of commission only.

I asked one of my doctoral students (*Mary Ann – a pseudonym*) to reiterate her perception of using learning contracts. Following is her take. Learning contracts offer multiple benefits, as the facilitator you are able to assess the learners interest, understanding, learning needs and goals effectively and efficiently, thus, enabling you, the facilitator to determine how to help the learner reach her/his individual learning objectives, thereby assessing learning outcomes. For the learner, learning contracts offer empowerment. Learning contracts are an example of the embodiment of the six assumptions of adult learners. Following are examples of how learning contracts exemplify Knowles' six assumptions of andragogy from one learner's viewpoint:

- As a learner I was required to be self-directed, I had a vast area of subject matter (limited to the specific course topic) and was trusted to know my individual learning needs and how to achieve them.
- The format for my learning was up to me. Example-I could have chosen: to seek knowledge by interviewing individual experts, by searching the internet, or the library. I could have sought understanding from books or others personal experiences; I could have attempted to gain skill by creating a presentation or by demonstration; most important to me was the ability to evaluate my learning myself, thus, enabling me to assess my learning and decide if I met my learning objective or what I still needed to learn. The format variety is unlimited which allows for active learner participation.
- Fulfills the readiness to learn desire in adults, although a grade is a requirement of the program or course the topic of research/learning is what I the learner felt I needed to learn about a given subject.
- My motivation for the use of each strategy was internal versus external. This format was about my desire to learn, not about fulfilling a program requirement.
- The entire learning contract is an example of one of the six assumptions of the adult learner – why learn something. The learners' 'need to know' is the beginning and end of using a learning contract and everything in between fed that need.
- As a learner my past learning experience provided a reference for the objectives I would ultimately choose to meet and which style/format I would choose to present and evaluate my learning.
- Learning contracts allow and encourage me to engage in an educational activity that is continually new and unfamiliar, thus allowing growth.
- This format (learning contracts) meets the traditional requirement of assessing learning and determining a course grade; however this format allows negotiation between facilitator and learner regarding individual learning goals and the expectation required to earn the desired grade.

These examples are only one learner's experience with using learning contracts; however, I feel that learning contracts provide more active learning opportunities and not just "another examination to study and remember answers for." My personal experience with learning contracts or the alternative to traditional grading is that the learners and facilitators who utilize learning contracts feel they have a trusting relationship between faculty responsible for grading and the learner; thus, enabling true learning.

Susan K. Isenberg

My observations included the idea that learning contracts are a creation of the learner, not the teacher. The act of simply creating a learning contract for self-planned learning marks the beginning of the learner's self-directed learning. I have used learning contracts inside and outside adult education classrooms in formal and non-formal learning environments—always with remarkable results. The tone of the learning environment seems to immediately change upon introduction of learning contracts from a feeling of having no control to a feeling of having all the control.

As a nurse educator in a hospital education department, I introduced the use of learning contracts with newly hired experienced critical care nurses to facilitate their competency gap learning. Instead of requiring all newly hired experienced critical care nurses to attend a 4-week fulltime critical care course which was expensive, time consuming, and disrespectful of their prior knowledge and experience, these nurses self-assessed their learning by comparing the new job competency requirements to their previous job(s). They created a learning contract—a gap plan for how they would learn only what they did not already know in order to meet the new job requirements. Strategies and tactics for how they would learn and the evidence and validation of their learning varied greatly from nurse to nurse, each creating a unique mix of learning experiences both formal and informal, textbook and on-the-job, shadowing experienced nurses and trying new skills under expert supervision, and even taking a portion of the formal critical care course that covered new knowledge and skill they needed for the job. Newly hired experienced critical care nurse orientation satisfaction increased while the cost decreased—a win-win outcome for the hospital.

As a consultant, I used learning contracts in executive coaching to help high-level leaders (CEOs, vice presidents, directors) self-assess and then engage in self-planned learning to improve such things as health, leadership, relationships, work-life balance, business strategy, and satisfaction over a 6-month period of time.

As an entrepreneur, I created software titled Virtual Health Coach, an example of a non-human planner (Tough, 1979) that helps users make behavior changes to improve their health. Users engage in an interactive coaching session with an animated talking character that tailors its responses to the users' responses and then helps them create a behavior change plan that is a modification of the learning contract. With one keystroke, users are then linked to online resources that match their behavior plan strategies and preferred learning style. Making a behavior change always requires learning something new related to knowledge, understanding, skill, attitude, value, and interest (Knowles, 1980).

As a professor of andragogy, I use learning contracts with my students in all masters and doctoral degree courses I teach—both on ground and online. Students plan their own learning within the context of the course content and negotiate with me for their grade. The learning contracts of students who have taken several andragogy courses demonstrate an increasing

complexity with each additional contract they create. Learning contracts are catching on in other non-andragogy courses taught by non-andragogy professors. A colleague of mine who is a non-andragogy professor always using learning contracts in her education research course since learning about them two years ago.

Monica Fedeli and Mario Giampaolo

The University of Padua, Italy is a very traditional institution, established in 1222, perhaps the oldest university in Italy, if not Europe. This is the university where Copernicus and Galileo were students and later became professors. Being quite traditional, they have not entertained much innovation in their practices, having adhered to more of a lecture style of teaching and learning. Nonetheless, when I (Monica Fedeli) met John Henschke at the 2010 American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) Conference in Clearwater, FL, it was the beginning of seeking to do a cooperative research venture in which it was decided to ~~de~~ use Learning Contracts and consider the pros and cons for student learning. In addition, I prepared a paper for the 2011 Midwest Research to Practice Conference in Adult, Continuing, Extension and Community Education, held at Lindenwood University, St. Charles, Missouri. John Henschke and I added some ideas related to researching on the use of Learning Contracts. We moved forward on considering our research. Henschke provided some of the basic materials he has used in learning contracts for many years (Knowles, 1975; and Knowles, 1986). This material has proven to be the most beneficial for people starting to work with learning contracts. Although some of them are difficult to understand at a first glance, we needed to start somewhere, and this seemed to be an excellent beginning.

Formatted: Font color: Red

Formatted: Font color: Red

When I returned to Italy from the Midwest Conference, Marion Giampaolo and I began to plan how we would take the Learning Contract materials and work with our students. Since Mario is a Doctoral Student of Monica, he would fulfill some of both capacities – facilitator and student. We decided to use the learning contract in ~~an action research a-course~~ that we would call, **The use of a Learning Contract within an Italian University system. -Learning contract: Improving planning and control of learning in academic course, An Italian practice.** The main research question was “In what ways can LCs be integrated into the Italian university system?” and “In what ways are LCs meaningful for students as tools in the learning process planning?”. ~~“how is it possible to introduce learning contracts in the Italian university system? And, if it is not possible to use the learning contract as a personalization tool, how could it be useful for students?”~~The number of students in the class was 48, with 46 being female, and two being male. The number deciding to use learning contracts was 37, and the average age of students was 35. One seasoned adult educator, **Marcie Boucouvalas**, said that in using learning contracts at the University of Padua, we were causing an earthquake.

Monica and Mario provided the following guidelines to the learners for using Learning Contracts (LC): Use the LC – to diagnose learning needs; specify learning objectives; identify learning resources and strategies; provide evidence of accomplishment; and show how evidence would be validated. An illustration of the LC was provided with such learning objectives as: To develop the knowledge of theories explaining the evolution of people

management; Acquisition of vocabulary related to organizational behavior; To understand the factors of personal development; Understand the links between organization and training; and, Identification of the different components of a methodology.

Participants judged the Learning Contract (LC) as 52 % positive, and 48 % negative. Positive elements were that the LC represents a novelty (8%), reflexive strategies (31%), monitoring strategies (19%), organizational strategies (14%), opportunity for personal growth (6%), opportunity to become aware (11%), opportunity for clarification (8%), and possibility of focusing (3%). Negative elements were that the LC represents misapplication [*difficulty of translating learning results into objectives*] (21%), negative feelings (18%), unknown practice (3%), complexity (33%), over-commitment (15%), and unnecessary practice (9%).

We came to the conclusion that we can adopt the same program of study for each group. The reflexivity of the LC tool allows one to activate clarifying learning results, better explain results, improve a sense of control, and embracing a deep sense of awareness. Often the LC is too complex to figure out in the time available, seems useless because time restricts turning learning results into objectives. As one implements using the LC, the positive factor is the help of the tutor and usefulness of the videos that were used. The negative side is the possible misunderstanding of the function and potential of the LC.

Expressed a bit differently, this study shows that the majority of students perceive the LC as a tool that allows reflection, control, and a sense of awareness on our learning. It provides the possibility of clarifying and explaining own learning results. Dividing the LC process in two, the introduction process and the compiling process, we have found that the most important problems happen during the compiling process. The most important negative judgments are about the complexity and the misapplication [*difficulty of turning and translating learning results into learning objectives*] of the tool especially during compiling, and misunderstanding the task during the presentation.

The Take Home Messages are as follows: First of all we have decided to use a learning contract based on learning results that each student has to reach, instead of on competencies that students need for their work. Second, students hadn't the possibility to really personalize their learning; they only learned how to fill LC. So, it has been difficult to understand the sense of the tool.

Comparing Learning Contracts in the USA and Italy

Some interesting comparisons can be made between the use of learning contracts (LC) in Italy and USA, as reflected in the University of Padua in Italy, and the University of Missouri and Lindenwood University in the USA. First, use of the LC by John A. Henschke at the University of Missouri (UM) began in 1975. He continued to use it consistently at UM until 2009, when he retired. He then continued to use it to the present time, after he joined the Lindenwood University Faculty in 2009. Susan K. Isenberg used the LC at UM from beginning in the late 1990s until being graduated with her doctoral degree in 2005. She also used it at the BJC Health Systems in St. Louis during that time until 2007, at which time she joined the

Lindenwood University Faculty and continues to use the LC to the present. Monica Fedeli and Mario Giampaolo, began using the LC in 2011 at the University of Padua and continue using it to the present. Based on this information, it would be natural to assume that there are varying stages of development, understanding, confidence and comfort with each of them using the LC with themselves and with their students and constituencies they serve.

Second, use of the LC in the USA with Isenberg and Henschke is oriented toward a connection with various learners and/or groups of learners or organizations with which they work – learners in the university and constituent groups and organizations in the surrounding communities. Their efforts have been aimed toward individual learning and on organizational purposes of very diverse nature. On the other hand, Fedeli and Giampaolo have focused their efforts almost exclusively on a group of approximately 50 students in one course at the University of Padua. This group focused on considering the possibilities of the benefits from the LC (a very innovative, non-traditional approach to university student learning) accruing to the students and their degree program[s], within considering how this may impact [positively or negatively] the course and degree program at Padua, that had traditionally been focused on lecture type of education.

Although there are some similar and some quite different outcomes that result from these different approaches in these very different cultural settings around our global community, each of these may be mutually applauded in their accomplishments. Learning is taking place in both and benefits are mounting and contributing to both groups of individuals and societies where these programs are being conducted.

It is well to consider the benefits that will come to both the group from Italy and the USA, if these professional people with share with, listen to, and understand the value of each other's approaches in the learning situations through use of Learning Contracts. If the relationship continues between these two countries through collaboration, much growth could be anticipated on both sides. The future will tell the story. We look forward to hearing and seeing it take place.

Lessons Learned

As facilitators of andragogy, we have learned that students can usually transfer some of what they already know about goal setting to learning contracts. Most have been involved in some kind of personal goal setting in their professional lives that prepares them, albeit in a limited way, for the task of developing a self-planned learning contract. Learning to develop and use a learning contract is a process of trial and error that seems to reach a point of enlightened self-satisfaction--when the fog lifts and they can see the purpose and value of engaging in such a process. The delight seems to come from being asked, often for the first time in their lives; What do you want to learn within the scope of this course content and how do you want to learn it? Thus, they are gaining control of their own learning. Time must be given to the development of personal learning contracts early in the course--each student requiring different kinds and amounts of feedback--for a positive learning experience to be the outcome.

It is important that students and faculty not overlook the benefits of each stage of the learning contract, and not expect the same benefits to be present at each stage along the way. It is a process of gaining knowledge of the LC, understanding the application of the LC to a specific situation in one's life or community, acquiring and implementing the skill of using the LC, gaining a positive forward looking attitude regarding the possibilities offered by the LC, increasing the ownership of valuing the LC in one's everyday life, and anticipating an increase of interest in exploring benefits of the LC.

References

- Atherton, J. S. (2011). *Teaching and learning; Learning contracts* [On-line: UK] retrieved 8 October 2012 from <file:///F:/Learning%20Contracts.mht>
- Berte, N. R. (1975). Individualizing education through contract learning. University, Alabama: University of Alabama.
- Collins, M. I. (1991) *Adult education as vocation*. London, Routledge.
- Comenius, J. A. (1982). *Selected pedagogical works*, Vol. 2, Moscow: Pedagogica (In Russian).
- Dressel, P. L., and Thompson, M. M. (1973). *Independent study: New interpretations of concepts, practices, and problems*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Knowles, M. S., (1975). *Self-directed learning: A guide for learners and teachers*. New York: Association Press.
- Knowles, M. S., (1986). *Using learning contracts*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Peterson, Deb (n. d.). *How to write a learning contract*. Retrieved 10/8/12 from: <http://adulted.about.com/od/intro/ht/learningcontrac.htm?rd=1> About.com Guide.
- Random House Webster's College Dictionary, (1991) New York: Random House Inc.
- Savicevic, D. (1991). Modern conceptions of andragogy: A European framework. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 23(3), 179-201.
- Tough, A. (1971). *The adults learning projects: A fresh approach to theory and practice in adult learning*. Toronto: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Paper presented to the 2012 International Society for Comparative Adult Education Conference, November 2-3, 2012. Las Vegas, NV