Literacy Practitioner

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The Getting of Wisdom:
What Critically Reflective Teaching is and Why It's Important

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I am honored that the editors chose to include a part of my book on critically reflective teaching and that they think it has some merit for literacy practice, surely one of the most contradictory, tiring and inspiring areas of the adult education field. There is one piece I wish to add to the article. Central to the act of critical reflection is the hunting of assumptions regarding power (its location, use, abuse and dynamics) and hegemony. Hegemony describes the process by which we embrace ideas, beliefs and practices thinking they are common sense, morally desirable and in our own best interests, but which are in reality harming us and serving the interests of others. So it's not just hunting assumptions that's important, but hunting assumptions of power and hegemony.

- Stephen Brookfield, November, 2002

We teach to change the world. The hope that undergirds our efforts to help students learn is that doing this will help them act towards each other, and to their environment, with compassion, understanding and fairness. But our attempts to increase the amount of love and justice in the world are never simple, never ambiguous. What we think are democratic, respectful ways of treating people can be experienced by them as oppressive and constraining. One of the hardest things teachers learn is that the sincerity of their intentions does not guarantee the purity of their practice. The cultural, psychological and political complexities of learning, and the ways in which power complicates all human relationships (including those between students and teachers) means that teaching can never be innocent.

Teaching innocently means thinking that we're always understanding exactly what it is that we're doing and what effect we're having. Teaching innocently means assuming that the meanings and significance we place in our actions are the ones that students take from them. At best, teaching this way is naive. At worst, it induces pessimism, guilt and lethargy. Since we rarely have full awareness of what we're doing, and since we frequently misread how others perceive our actions, an uncritical stance towards our practice sets us up for a lifetime of frustration. Nothing seems to work out as it should. Our inability to control what looks like chaos becomes, to our eyes, evidence of our incompetence.

Breaking this vicious circle of innocence and blame is one reason why the habit of critical reflection is crucial for teachers' survival. Without a critically reflective stance towards what we do we tend to accept the blame for problems that are not of our own making. We think that all resistance to learning displayed by students is caused by our own insensitivity or unpreparedness. We read poor evaluations of our teaching (often written by only a small minority of our students) and immediately conclude that we are hopeless failures. We become depressed when ways of behaving towards students and colleagues that we think are democratic and respectful are interpreted as aloof or manipulative. A critically reflective stance towards our teaching helps us avoid these traps of demoralization and self-laceration. It might not win us easy promotion or bring us lots of friends. But it does increase enormously the chances that we will survive in the classroom with enough energy and sense of purpose to have some real effect on those we teach.

Understanding Reflection as Hunting Assumptions

Critical reflection is one particular aspect of the larger process of reflection. To understand critical reflection properly we need first to know something about the reflective process in general. The most distinctive feature of the reflective process is its focus on hunting assumptions.

Assumptions are the taken for granted beliefs about the world, and our place within it, that seem so obvious to us as not to need to be stated explicitly. In many ways we *are* our assumptions. Assumptions give meaning and purpose to who we are and what we do. Becoming aware of the implicit assumptions that frame how we think and act is one of the most puzzling intellectual challenges we face in our lives. It is also something we instinctively resist, for fear of what we might discover. Who wants to clarify and question assumptions she has lived by for a substantial period of time, only to find out that they don't make sense? What makes the process of assumption hunting particularly complicated is that assumptions are not all of the same character. I find it useful to distinguish between three broad categories of assumptions - paradigmatic, prescriptive, and causal.

Paradigmatic assumptions are the hardest of all assumptions to uncover. They are the structuring assumptions

we use to order the world into fundamental categories. Usually we don't even recognize them as assumptions, even after they've been pointed out to us. Instead we insist that they're objectively valid renderings of reality, the facts as we know them to be true. Some paradigmatic assumptions I have held at different stages of my life as a teacher are that adults are self-directed learners, that critical thinking is an intellectual function characteristic of adult life, that good adult educational processes are inherently democratic, and that education always has a political dimension. Paradigmatic assumptions are examined critically only after a great deal of resistance to doing this, and it takes a considerable amount of contrary evidence and disconfirming experiences to change them. But when they are challenged and changed, the consequences for our lives are explosive.

Prescriptive assumptions are assumptions about what we think ought to be happening in a particular situation. They are the assumptions that are surfaced as we examine how we think teachers should behave, what good educational processes should look like, and what obligations students and teachers owe to each other. Inevitably they are grounded in, and extensions of, our paradigmatic assumptions. For example, if you believe that adults are self-directed learners then you assume that the best teaching is that which encourages students to take control over designing, conducting and evaluating their own learning.

Causal assumptions are assumptions about how different parts of the world work and about the conditions under which these can be changed. They are usually stated in predictive terms. An example of a causal assumption would be that if we use learning contracts this will increase students' self-directedness. Another would be the assumption that if we make mistakes in front of students this creates a trustful environment for learning in which students feel free to make errors with no fear of censure or embarrassment. Of all the assumptions we hold, causal ones are the easiest to uncover. Most of the reflective exercises described in this book will, if they work well, clarify teachers' causal assumptions. But discovering and investigating these is only the start of the reflective process. We must then try to find a way to work back to the more deeply embedded prescriptive and paradigmatic assumptions we hold.

Hunting Assumptions: Some Examples

One way to demonstrate the benefits of the reflective habit is to point out what happens when it is absent. Without this habit we run the continual risk of making poor decisions and bad judgments. We take actions on the basis of assumptions that are unexamined and we believe unquestioningly that others are reading into our actions the meanings that we intend. We fall into the habits of justifying what we do by reference to unchecked "common sense" and of thinking that the unconfirmed evidence of our own eyes is always accurate and valid. "Of course we know what's going on in our classrooms" we say to ourselves, "after all, we've been doing this for years, haven't we?" Yet unexamined common sense is a notoriously unreliable guide to action.

Consider the following examples of how common sense assumptions inform action. All these assumptions and actions are probably familiar to readers, particularly those who see themselves as progressive. After each example of a common sense assumption I give a plausible alternative interpretation that calls its validity into question.

It's common sense to visit small groups after you've set them a task, since this demonstrates your commitment to helping them learn. Visiting groups is an example of respectful, attentive, student-centered teaching.

Visiting students after you've set them a task can seem like a form of assessment - a way of checking up to see whether they're doing what you told them to do. This can come across as insulting to students, since it implies that you don't trust them enough to do what you've asked. Students might change their behavior during your visit to their group as a way of impressing you with the kinds of behaviors they think you want to see. Their overwhelming concern becomes to show you what good, efficient, task-oriented students they are, rather than with thoughtfully analyzing and critiquing the task at hand.

It's common sense to cut lecturing down to a minimum since lecturing induces passivity in students and kills critical thinking.

Before students can engage critically with ideas and actions they may need a period of assimilation and grounding in a subject area or skill set. Lecturing may be a very effective way of ensuring this. Before students can be expected to think critically they must see this process modeled in front of their eyes. A lecture in which a teacher models a questioning of her own assumptions, a recognition of ethical dilemmas hidden in her position, an identification of inconvenient theories, facts and philosophies that she has deliberately overlooked, and an openness to considering alternate viewpoints, is the necessary precursor to students doing these same things. Through critically stimulating lectures a teacher sets a critical tone for learning. By first modeling the process herself, she earns the right to ask students to think critically.

It's common sense to use learning contracts since they are democratic, cooperative forms of assessment that give students a sense of control and independence.

Unless the ground for learning contracts has been well prepared, and a detailed case for them has been built, students may interpret their use as evidence of a teacher's laziness or of a laissez faire, intellectual relativism. Students can only make informed choices about what they need to know, how they can know it, and how they can know that they know it, on the basis of as full as possible an understanding of the learning terrain they are being asked to explore. Learning contracts should only be used, therefore, when students know the grammar of the activity. They should understand its internal rules for inquiry, the analytical processes it requires, and the criteria used to judge meritorious achievement in the area. Only if they know these can they make informed choices about what and how to learn.

It's common sense that students like group discussion since they feel involved and respected. Discussion methods build upon principles of participatory, active learning.

Democratic discourse is a habit that is rarely learned or practiced in daily life. When discussion groups form they reflect power dynamics and communicative inequities in the larger society. They also provide a showcase for egomaniacal grandstanding. Students will be highly skeptical of group discussion if the teacher has not earned the right to ask students to work this way by first modeling her own commitment to this

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Training Directors and Board Members

Janice Cuddahee
Associate Executive Director
Literacy Volunteers of America – New York State

In the mid-1990's, when Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) affiliate accreditation was a new idea, a group of local, state, and national representatives came together to discuss and prioritize affiliate activities and grapple with "standards of accountability." The questions became: What are the most important tasks that local programs engage in? How do we measure success? What would an accreditated program look like?

At the top of everyone's list of tasks was "training" because that's what local programs do – train tutors. But then came the tough questions: What constitutes a good training? What does it mean to be a good trainer?

Using Jane Vella's *Principles of Effective Training* as a framework, the group focused on how to certify and recertify tutor trainers, and who would be included in the certification process. The underlying assumption was simple: if skilled trainers facilitate quality training, tutors will have better skills to help students reach their goals. Building on that assumption, affiliates and state offices spent countless hours and dollars developing and/or enhancing systems designed to help trainer's train and tutors succeed.

However, it has become clear that the need for quality training doesn't stop with tutors; in fact, it's only the beginning. Literacy programs, like most not-for-profit organizations, encounter significant board and staff turnover. To better prepare Literacy Volunteers for these personnel changes, energy must also be focused on human resource management issues and "training" for board and staff positions.

What kind of investment is there in training Executive Directors, Administrative Volunteers, Board Presidents, Board Committee Chairs and Officers? Each year, across the LVA network, the same comments are heard over and over:

"I'm the third Executive Director in four years. I'm willing to do anything – as soon as someone shows me what it is I'm supposed to do."

"As the new Board President, I went through the former President's Board box and notebook, but nothing was there."

LVA invests greatly in training tutors, but we don't give a second thought to throwing a new Executive Director or Board President into a deep ocean and hope they know, or quickly learn, how to swim. As we develop long-range plans and re-visit our training commitment, we need to continue providing quality tutor training and place a higher priority on training Executive Directors, Board Presidents and others within the organization. By investing in our organizational decision-makers, Literacy Volunteers can shape a strong nonprofit network capable of meeting the increased expectations to provide more service with ever shrinking resources. It will be a wise investment!

Watch for the LVA-NYS "Trainer Corps" resources at lvanys.org

Literacy Volunteers of America

NEW YORK STATE

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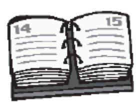
Trainer Corps

The LVA-NYS Trainer Corps is an integral component of support for the 48 community and agency-based affiliates in the LVA-NYS network.

The corps provides training, offering regional workshops in literacy topics necessary for affiliates to meet LVA's Accreditation standards.

Bulletin Board

Trainer Corps Members Only



Training Schedule

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Lose The Lectern!

Learning Centered Literacy Training

By Jane Vella Ed.D.

How can we transform our teaching and training so that we are sure learners learn? How can we prepare literacy teachers in such a way that they turn to their own students with the same principles they met in the training course: engagement, respect, sequence, etc.

In literacy training, the center is not the lectern where the trainer stands, but the tables where the new literacy teachers sit, doing learning tasks in dialogue with one another, practicing the skills they are learning, constructing the theories they are studying.

"Learning centered" activity engages participants in reflective thought and discussion of open questions that they have the resources to respond to. These "learning tasks" challenge them to re-create theory in their own context. The process also emboldens them to try new skills and test new attitudes in a "safe" setting with peers.

Imagine a room abuzz with the energy of men and women in dialogue, sharing their stories in a focused learning task that re-creates the theory they are examining. Witness the fun, and the learning, occurring at every table as people move to closure within a specified time frame. Note the attention paid as participants share the "distillate" of their task with the larger group.

The design of such learning events requires clear objectives and careful sequencing to move tasks from simple to complex and work from solo to shared. Almost magically, adult learners who are engaged, active, and empowered can make a lectern disappear.

Two Models of Education:

Trainer-Centered	Learning-Centered
• Participants are passive	• Participants are engaged, active, and focused
• Theory is static	• Theory is re-created, tested, examined, and applied
• Information is offered	• New information is presented with learning tasks
• Time is devoted to trainer talking	• Time is devoted to completing learning tasks
• Overheads summarize info	• Overheads state learning tasks

12 Principles of "Learning-Centered" Program Design:

Principle 1:
Needs Assessment

Needs assessments honor the fact that while many people register for a program, they all come with different experiences and expectations. Those whose primary educational needs are ignored quickly become bored or indifferent. They tune out or vote with their feet and walk out. Either way, they're unlikely to return. Needs assessment is a "listening effort" that enables learners to help shape what is to be taught. People are naturally excited to learn anything that will help them better understand their lives, and their motivation is enhanced when they are given the opportunity to establish their own educational themes.

Principle 2:
Safety

Safety is achieved when development of the learning tasks, the atmosphere in the room, and the design of small group exercises and materials convey to learners that the experience will be beneficial.

While it does not obviate the challenges of learning new concepts, skills, and attitudes, safety creates an inviting setting for those things to occur.

How do you create such a setting? Start by establishing and reinforcing the competence of both the program design and the facilitator. When reviewing objectives, point out how they were established.

Allow small groups to find their own voice. Create a sequence of activities, building from simple to complex. Strive to keep the environment non-judgmental.

Also remember to "affirm" every idea and comment that is offered. Affirming is one of a teachers' basic responsibilities; when a participant says something in a group and there is no affirmation or recognition, the words fall to the floor unacknowledged, often destroying not only the individual's sense of safety, but that of everyone else in the room.

Principle 3:
Sound Relationships

True dialogue is not possible when we have to carefully weigh each and every word that comes out of our mouths. In a sound relationship, both the participant and the trainer can speak their minds. Presenting relevant and exciting learning tasks in an environment that fosters dialogue eradicates the seeds of distrust, fear, and intimidation.

Trainees can quickly sense when a facilitator is addressing their needs. Imagine, for example, a workshop that begins with the trainer asking participants to re-read the program description and then to suggest additional objectives they would like to see addressed. This "listening task" on the part of the facilitator acknowledges the experience of the trainees and goes a long way toward establishing a sound relationship for dialogue.

Principle 4:
Sequence and Reinforcement

Sequence describes the programming of learning tasks in an order that goes from simple to complex and from solo to group-supported. Failure to honor this concept can lead to people dropping out of courses and actually believing that they cannot learn.

Reinforcement occurs from the repetition of facts, skills, and attitudes in diverse, engaging and interesting ways until they are learned. If adults are to be held accountable for achievement-based objectives, they must receive adequate reinforcement.

Careful listening will prompt an experienced facilitator to adjust learning tasks in order to meet the need for reinforcement. A task that proves too difficult for most of a group, for example, must be changed. This mutual accountability is the essence of "learning as dialogue."

Principle 5:
Praxis

Praxis is a Greek word that means "action with reflection." Educators unanimously agree that adults learn best by doing.

Praxis suggests doing with "built-in reflection." This is how the process of praxis might look in linear form:

Doing/Reflecting/Deciding/Changing/New Doing

These four questions can guide training participants through the process:

1. Description: What do you see happening?
2. Analysis: Why do you think it is happening?
3. Application: When it happens in your situation, what problems does it cause?
4. Implementation: What can we do about it?

Learning tasks and materials should give participants the chance to practice new ideas, skills, and attitudes…and immediately reflect on them.

Principle 6:
Respect

Treating adults as "subjects" of their own learning recognizes that, in most parts of their lives, they already are decision makers. They steadfastly resist being treated as "objects." As a result, they need to know that they themselves decide what will occur in the learning event.

It is, of course, necessary to distinguish between the "consultative" voice (a suggestion) and the "deliberative" voice (a decision). But as a rule, effective trainers never do or decide what trainees can do or decide on their own. Learning occurs both in doing and deciding; be careful not to steal that opportunity.

Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire titled one of his books *Education as the Practice of Freedom.* Inviting participants to be the subjects of their own learning is indeed the practice of freedom.

Principle 7:
Ideas, Feelings and Actions

The fact that the mind, emotions, and muscles all play a vital role in learning is often overlooked. "The brain thinks it is running the show but it isn't really," noted Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth*, published in 1988. "It is a peripheral organ, secondary at best."

The so-called "domains" of learning are cognitive (ideas), affective (feelings), and psychomotor (actions). Their linkage can be observed in the seemingly simple process of preparing an agenda for a first-time meeting. Among the questions that should be asked in preparation are the following: Who will decide what is to be included on the agenda? What will the meeting's other stakeholders think? How should the agenda be formatted?

Answers to these questions require a cognitive approach (defining the agenda), a psychomotor approach (designing it), and an affective approach (considering the implications for others attending the meeting). According to pioneering theorist Kurt Lewin, little substantive learning takes place unless all three aspects are involved.

Principle 8:
Immediacy

Adults need to see the immediate usefulness of new learning. Because time is so precious to them, they want to study those skills and theories that will immediately make a clear difference to them.

The best way to discover a group's real concerns is simply to ask! Needs assessment yields a road map for content development, but it is the design of learning tasks that are relevant, well-sequenced, and continually reinforced that create immediacy.

We do not suggest "losing the lectern" merely to be clever; when a classic "talking head" holds court, rarely does a program offer participants information that is immediately beneficial.

Principle 9:
Clear Roles

Adult learners need reinforcement of equity between themselves and their trainers. If a trainee perceives a facilitator as "a professor," with whom there is no disagreement, questioning, or challenge, the essential adult learning concept of "dialogue" is dead in the water.

In learning-centered programs, anything that impedes dialogue is addressed and eradicated; anything that enables dialogue is nurtured and used. Establishing "equitable" roles helps make dialogue more accessible.

Principle 10:
Teamwork

How often have you heard people in an educational setting say: "When we get back to the real world…" Teams are the real world. The things that occur in group exercises tend to mirror experiences that occur every day. Many adults who feel overwhelmed or excluded in small groups will act out those feeling in other settings.

For that reason, peers become one of the most powerful influences in the adult learning process. Because they are able to draw on a bank of shared experiences, peers can challenge one another in ways a trainer cannot. Equally important, they can create safety for a team member who is struggling with a complex concept. In effective adult learning programs, teamwork is a process as well as a principle.

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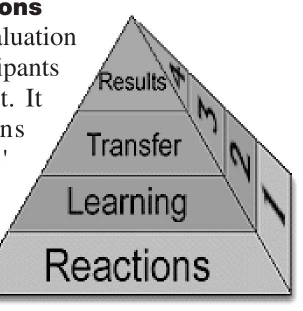
Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Evaluation

Assessing training effectiveness often entails using the four-level model developed by Donald Kirkpatrick (1994). According to this model, evaluation should always begin with level one, and then, as time and budget allows, should move sequentially through levels two, three, and four. Information from each prior level serves as a base for the next level's evaluation. Thus, each successive level represents a more precise measure of the effectiveness of the training program, but at the same time requires a more rigorous and time-consuming analysis.

Level 1 Evaluation - Reactions

Just as the word implies, evaluation at this level measures how participants in a training program react to it. It attempts to answer questions regarding the participants' perceptions - Did they like it? Was the material relevant to their work? According to Kirkpatrick, every program should at least be evaluated at this level to provide for the improvement of a training program. In addition, the participants' reactions have important consequences for learning (level two). Although a positive reaction does not guarantee learning, a negative reaction almost certainly reduces its possibility.

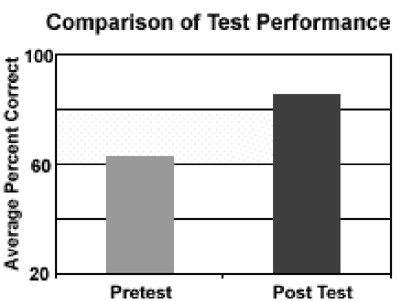


In Kirkpatrick's four-level model, each successive evaluation level is built on information provided by the lower level.

Level 2 Evaluation - Learning

To assess the amount of learning that has occurred due to a training program, level two evaluations often use tests conducted before training (pretest) and after training (post test).

Assessing at this level moves the evaluation beyond learner satisfaction and attempts to assess the extent students have advanced in skills, knowledge, or attitude. Measurement at this level is more difficult and laborious than level one. Methods range from formal to informal testing to team assessment and self-assessment. If possible, participants take the test or assessment before the training (pretest) and after training (post test) to determine the amount of learning that has occurred.

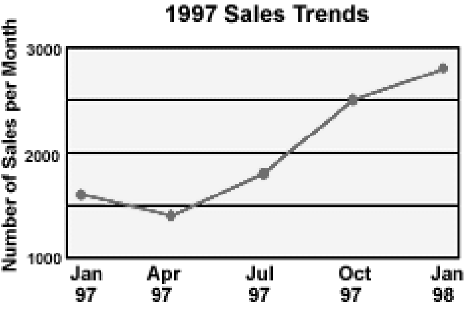


Level 3 Evaluation - Transfer

This level measures the transfer that has occurred in learners' behavior due to the training program. Evaluating at this level attempts to answer the question - Are the newly acquired skills, knowledge, or attitude being used in the everyday environment of the learner? For many trainers this level represents the truest assessment of a program's effectiveness. However, measuring at this level is difficult as it is often impossible to predict when the change in behavior will occur, and thus requires important decisions in terms of when to evaluate, how often to evaluate, and how to evaluate.

Level 4 Evaluation - Results

Level four evaluation attempts to assess training in terms of business results. In this case, sales transactions improved steadily after training for sales staff occurred in April 1997.



Frequently thought of as the bottom line, this level measures the success of the program in terms that managers and executives can understand: increased production, improved quality, decreased costs, reduced frequency of accidents, increased sales, and even higher profits or return on investment. From a business and organizational perspective, this is the overall reason for a training program, yet level four results are not typically addressed. Determining results in financial terms is difficult to measure, and is hard to link directly with training. ■

Elaine C. Winfrey, San Diego State University Graduate Student, Educational Technology, 2001

Evaluation/Return on Investment (ROI)

"It has been over 40 years since Kirkpatrick's articles on the steps of evaluation were first published in ASTD's Journal for the American Society for Training Directors. Since then, the steps have become levels, the articles have become a classic model of evaluation used by training professionals around the globe.... When asked why the model is widely used, Kirkpatrick says, 'It's simple and practical. Many trainers aren't much interested in a scholarly, complex approach. They want something they can understand and use'."

From: ASTD – Learning Communities – Resources http://www.astd.org/virtual_community/comm_evaluation/reading.html

30 Things We Know For Sure About Adult Learning

By Ron and Susan Zemke

A variety of sources provides us with a body of fairly reliable knowledge about adult learning. This knowledge might be divided into three basic divisions: things we know about adult learners and their motivation, things we know about designing curriculum for adults, and things we know about working with adults in the classroom.

Motivation to Learn

1. Adults seek out learning experiences in order to cope with specific life-changing events—e.g., marriage, divorce, a new job, a promotion, being fired, retiring, losing a loved one, moving to a new city.
2. The more life change events an adult encounters, the more likely he or she is to seek out learning opportunities. Just as stress increases as life-change events accumulate, the motivation to cope with change through engagement in a learning experience increases.
3. The learning experiences adults seek out on their own are directly related – at least in their perception – to the life-change events that triggered the seeking.
4. Adults are generally willing to engage in learning experiences before, after, or even during the actual life change event. Once convinced that the change is a certainty, adults will engage in any learning that promises to help them cope with the transition.
5. Adults who are motivated to seek out a learning experience do so primarily because they have a use for the knowledge or skill being sought. Learning is a means to an end, not an end in itself.
6. Increasing or maintaining one's sense of self-esteem and pleasure are strong secondary motivators for engaging in learning experiences.

Curriculum Design

1. Adult learners tend to be less interested in, and enthralled by, survey courses. They tend to prefer single concept, single-theory courses that focus heavily on the application of the concept to relevant problems. This tendency increases with age.
2. Adults need to be able to integrate new ideas with what they already know if they are going to keep – and use – the new information.
3. Information that conflicts sharply with what is already held to be true, and thus forces a re-evaluation of the old material, is integrated more slowly.
4. Information that has little "conceptual overlap" with what is already known is acquired slowly.
5. Fast-paced, complex or unusual learning tasks interfere with the learning of the concepts or data they are intended to teach or illustrate.
6. Adults tend to compensate for being slower in some psychomotor learning tasks by being more accurate and making fewer trial-and-error ventures.
7. Adults tend to take errors personally and are more likely to let them affect self-esteem. Therefore, they tend to apply tried-and-true solutions and take fewer risks.
8. The curriculum designer must know whether the concepts or ideas will be in concert or in conflict with the learner. Some instruction must be designed to effect a change in belief and value systems.
9. Programs need to be designed to accept viewpoints from people in different life stages and with different value "sets."
10. A concept needs to be "anchored" or explained from more than one value set and appeal to more than one developmental life stage.
11. Adults prefer self-directed and self-designed learning projects over group-learning experiences led by a professional; they select more than one medium for learning, and they desire to control pace and start/stop time.
12. Nonhuman media such as books, programmed instruction and television have become popular with adults in recent years.
13. Regardless of media, straightforward how-to is the preferred content orientation. Adults cite a need for application and how-to information as the primary motivation for beginning a learning project.
14. Self-direction does not mean isolation. Studies of self-directed learning indicate that self-directed projects involve an average of 10 other people as resources, guides, encouragers and the like. But even for the self-professed, self-directed learner, lectures and short seminars get positive ratings, especially when these events give the learner face-to-face, one-to-one access to an expert.

In the Classroom

1. The learning environment must be physically and psychologically comfortable; long lectures, periods of interminable sitting and the absence of practice opportunities rate high on the irritation scale.
2. Adults have something real to lose in a classroom situation. Self-esteem and ego are on the line when they are asked to risk trying a new behavior in front of peers and cohorts. Bad experiences in traditional education, feelings about authority and the preoccupation with events outside the classroom affect in-class experience.
3. Adults have expectations, and it is critical to take time early on to clarify and articulate all expectations before getting into content. The instructor can assume responsibility only for his or her own expectations, not for those of students.
4. Adults bring a great deal of life experience into the classroom, an invaluable asset to be acknowledged, tapped and used. Adults can learn well – and much – from dialogue with respected peers.

5. Instructors who have a tendency to hold forth rather than facilitate can hold that tendency in check—or compensate for it—by concentrating on the use of open-ended questions to draw out relevant student knowledge and experience.
6. New knowledge has to be integrated with previous knowledge; students must actively participate in the learning experience. The learner is dependent on the instructor for confirming feedback on skill practice; the instructor is dependent on the learner for feedback about curriculum and in-class performance.
7. The key to the instructor role is control. The instructor must balance the presentation of new material, debate and discussion, sharing of relevant student experiences, and the clock. Ironically, it seems that instructors are best able to establish control when they risk giving it up. When they shelve egos and stifle the tendency to be threatened by challenge to plans and methods, they gain the kind of facilitative control needed to effect adult learning.
8. The instructor has to protect minority opinion, keep disagreements civil and unheated, make connections between various opinions and ideas, and keep reminding the group of the variety of potential solutions to the problem. The instructor is less advocate than orchestrator.
9. Integration of new knowledge and skill requires transition time and focused effort on application.
10. Learning and teaching theories function better as resources than as a Rosetta stone. A skill-training task can draw much from the behavioral approach, for example, while personal growth-centered subjects seem to draw gainfully from humanistic concepts. An eclectic, rather than a single theory-based approach to developing strategies and procedures, is recommended for matching instruction to learning tasks.

The next five years will eclipse the last fifty in terms of hard data production on adult learning. For the present, we must recognize that adults want their learning to be problem-oriented, personalized and accepting of their need for self-direction and personal responsibility. ■

Innovation Abstracts Vol VI, No 8, March 9, 1984

Lose the Lectern! continued from page 5

Principle 11:
Engagement

A “typical” lecture in a college classroom or a training session – in which one person speaks, 40 listen passively, and two or three doze – defines an environment in which there is no concern for the engagement of the participants.

Contrast that with a program that bounces back and forth in small group settings, with adult learners sharing their personal experiences in relevant tasks designed to push the envelope to develop new ides, skills, and applications.

That is engagement.

Think for a minute: Do your training programs pulse with the “sound” of engagement? Are training rooms abuss with dialogue, laughter, argument, and movement? Or is the only sound you hear a single voice? The creation of engagement is as necessary to learning as light is to the development of a plant.

Principle 12:
Accountability

No trainer can learn for a participant. The design of effective adult education programs, however, must be accountable to the trainee.

The contract is straightforward: What was proposed to be taught must be taught; what was meant to be learned must be learned. The skills intended to be gained should be apparent to all trainees. There should be evidence of the knowledge acquired in their language and reasoning. Intended changes in attitude should be observable.

One of the most significant problems in the education of adults is the perceived distance between trainer and participant, manager and employee, doctor and patient, tutor and adult learner. The principles of learning-centered design are intended to close that gap. ■

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Teaching Adults: Is It Different?
Myths and Realities

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The adult education literature generally supports the idea that teaching adults should be approached in a different way than teaching children and adolescents. The assumption that teachers of adults should use a different style of teaching is based on the widely espoused theory of andragogy, which suggests that "adults expect learner-centered settings where they can set their own goals and organize their own learning around their present life needs" (Donaldson, Flannery, and Ross-Gordon 1993, p. 148). However, even in the field of adult education, debate occurs about the efficacy of a separate approach for teaching adults. Some believe that adult education is essentially the same process as education generally (Garrison 1994) and therefore does not require a separate teaching approach: that is, all good teaching, whether for adults or children, should be responsive in nature.

The question of whether teaching adults is different remains ambiguous. For example, research summarized in an ERIC Digest (Imel 1989) has shown that even those educators who say they believe in using an andragogical approach do not necessarily use a different style when teaching adults. Additional myths and realities related to teaching adults are explored in this publication. Two areas are examined: types of adult learning and what learners themselves want from teachers.

Different Types of Adult Learning

One way to approach the question of whether teaching adults is different is by examining the types of learning in which adults engage. Drawing upon the work of Habermas and Mezirow, Cranton (1994) classified adult learning into three categories:

Subject-oriented adult learning – In adult learning contexts that are subject oriented, the primary goal is to acquire content. The educator "speaks of covering the material, and the learners see themselves as gaining knowledge or skills" (ibid., p. 10).

Consumer-oriented adult learning – The goal of consumer-oriented learning is to fulfill the expressed needs of learners. Learners set their learning goals, identify objectives, select relevant resources, and so forth. The educator acts as a facilitator or resource person, "and does not engage in challenging or questioning what learners say about their needs" (ibid., p. 12).

Emancipatory adult learning – The goal of emancipatory learning is to free learners from the forces that limit their options and control over their lives, forces that they have taken for granted or seen as beyond their control. Emancipatory learning results in transformations of learner perspectives through critical reflection (Mezirow 1991). The educator plays an active role in fostering critical reflection by challenging learners to consider why they hold certain assumptions, values, and beliefs (Cranton 1994).

"All good teaching, whether for adults or children, should be responsive in nature."

Of the three types of adult learning, only emancipatory has been described as unique to adulthood, but even that claim has been challenged (Merriam and Caffarella 1991). Subject-oriented learning is the most common form of learning engaged in by youth. Collaborative and cooperative learning and other types of experiential learning that are more consumer oriented are also found in youth classrooms. However, according to Mezirow (1981), emancipatory learning, with its emphasis upon learner transformation, can take place only in adulthood because, "it is only in late adolescence and in adulthood that a person can recognize being caught in his/her own history and reliving it" (p. 11). In adulthood, "rather than merely adapting to changing circumstances by more diligently applying old ways of knowing . . . [individuals] discover a need to acquire new perspectives in order to gain a more complete understanding of changing events and a higher degree of control over their lives. The formative learning of childhood becomes transformative learning in adulthood" (Mezirow 1991, p. 3). As a result of the research and theory-building efforts of Mezirow–fully described in Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning (1991)–emancipatory adult learning has become more commonly known as transformative learning.

Teaching Approaches for Transformative Learning

If transformative learning is unique to adulthood, does it require the use of teaching approaches that are geared specifically to adults? This is not clear. It is true that transformative learning requires that learners address problems through critical reflection. Some strategies used to facilitate transformative learning, e.g., such as journal writing, critical incidents, and experiential methods, are used in other types of learning as well. (See Cranton 1994 and Mezirow and Associates 1990 for a full discussion of these and other methods that can be used to promote transformative learning.)

What is clear is that fostering transformative learning demands a different approach by the educator. Although learners must decide on their own to engage in transformative learning, educators who wish to promote transformative learning have the responsibility to set the stage and provide opportunities for critical reflection (Cranton 1994). When educators are operating in the domain of transformative learning, they help learners examine their beliefs and how they have acquired them by creating situations in which they can debate how their values, assumptions, ideologies, and beliefs have come to be constructed (Newman 1993). Instead of congratulating themselves for having made their point when a learner says, "I never looked at it that way before," educators can help learners engage in transformative learning by responding with, "How did you see things?" and then, "What

made you see things like that?" and then "If we can understand how you came to have a set of ideas and attitudes then, let's look at how you come to have the ideas and attitudes you have now" (ibid., p. 182).

Of course, not all adult learning is transformative in nature; many adult educators also do not believe that they have a role in helping adults engage in critical reflection and, consequently, never operate in the transformative domain. Those who do, however, perceive that teaching adults is different.

What Do Adults Expect From Teaching?

Examining what adult learners expect from teaching provides another perspective on whether teaching adults is different. In this context, the question might be more appropriately posed, "Based on adult students' expectations, should teaching adults be different?" In an effort to answer this question, Donaldson, Flannery, and Ross-Gordon (1993) combined and reanalyzed research that examined adult college students' expectations of effective teaching and compared them with those of traditional students.

Previously, each of the authors had conducted investigations that looked at aspects of this question. Donaldson (1989) used a case study approach to examine student letters recommending faculty members for an excellence in off-campus teaching award. Flannery (1991) interviewed 68 returning students during the first semester back at school, asking them what they expected of instructors in the classroom. Ross-Gordon (1991) used the Critical Incident Technique to collect examples of the best and poorest instructors that respondents had encountered during college. Data for Ross-Gordon's study were collected through a questionnaire mailed to a randomly selected sample of adult undergraduates. The results from all three studies suggested that adult students might have "different" expectations for teachers that in some ways paralleled the assumptions underlying an andragogical approach, but each researcher also found some similarities to expectations for a teacher-directed approach. By combining the results of their studies, the researchers were able to confirm and extend their individual results and also add an element that compared the expectations of adult students to those of traditional students as reflected in the literature.

"Although learners must decide on their own to engage in transformative learning, educators who wish to promote transformative learning have the responsibility to set the stage and provide opportunities for critical reflection."

In the combined results, the six most frequently mentioned attributes adult learners expected of effective instructors were as follows (Donaldson, Flannery, and Ross-Gordon 1993, p. 150): to be knowledgeable; to show concern for student learning; to present material clearly; to motivate; to emphasize relevance of class material; to be enthusiastic.

Thus, the adult learners in this study demonstrated preferences for characteristics associated with both student-centered (e.g., relevance of material, concern for student learning) and teacher-directed (e.g., knowledge, clarity) instruction. When adult expectations for good teaching were compared with those of traditional students, many similarities existed in how the two groups characterized good teaching. However, four teacher characteristics mentioned by adults that were not among the top items for undergraduates were as follows: creates a comfortable learning atmosphere; uses a variety of techniques; adapts to meet diverse needs; dedicated to teaching.

Donaldson, Flannery, and Ross-Gordon (1993) point out that the first three of these items are congruent with the principles of instruction found in the adult education literature. Perhaps, as suggested by the researchers, when it comes to teaching adults, "the issue is not to continue to promote an either/or approach with regard to teaching expectations of adults, but rather to concentrate on the particular attributes which adults consistently select as important for effective teaching" (ibid., p. 150).

Conclusion

Is teaching adults different? Based upon the literature discussed here, the answer is both yes and no. Perhaps a better way to frame the question would be "Should teaching adults be different?" The answer to that would, of course, depend upon the purpose of the teaching-learning situation, including what approach and methods seem to be appropriate, as well as the needs of the learners. Many of the myths related to teaching adults emerge from an uncritical acceptance of the theory of andragogy. Unfortunately, the assumptions underlying the theory are still largely untested through research. Pratt (1993) also points out that adult educators need to examine the philosophical assumptions underlying andragogy in order to clarify "the underlying values and beliefs and . . . central concept of [adult] learning" (p. 87).

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process. Before asking students to engage in discussion, therefore, teachers must first find a way of demonstrating their own engagement in this activity. One way to do this might be by holding several public discussions with colleagues early on in a course. In these discussions teachers would model respectful disagreement and constructive criticism. Teachers would then work with students to create ground rules for democratic discourse that nullify, as much as possible, the inequities of race, class and gender that are inevitably imported into the group from the wider society.

It's common sense that respectful, empathic teachers will downplay their position of presumed superiority and acknowledge their students as co-teachers.

To students who have made great sacrifices to attend an educational activity, a teacher's attempts to deconstruct her authority through avowals of how she'll learn more from the students than they will from her, come across as false modesty. Students know teachers have particular expertise, experience, skill and knowledge. To pretend otherwise is to insult students' intelligence and to create a note of mistrust from the outset. Students will feel happy with their role as co-teachers only after the teacher's credibility has been established to their satisfaction and after they know what she stands for.

It's common sense that teaching is essentially mysterious, so that if we try to dissect it or understand its essence, we kill it.

Viewing teaching as a process of unfathomable mystery removes the necessity to think about what we do. Any serious inquiry into practice appears as reductionistic and asinine. But the teaching as mystery metaphor can be a convenient shield for incompetence. It excuses teachers from having to answer such basic questions as "how do you know when you are teaching well?" – "how do you know your students are learning?" and "how could your practice be made more responsive?" Seeing teaching as mysterious works against the improvement of practice. If good or bad teaching are all a matter of chance then there is no point trying to do better. The teaching as mystery metaphor also closes down the possibility of teachers sharing knowledge, insights, and informal theories of practice since mystery is, by definition, incommunicable.

It's common sense that teachers who have been working the longest have the best instincts about what students want and what approaches work best. If my own instincts as a novice conflict with what experienced teachers tell me is true, I should put these instincts aside and defer to the wisdom of their experience.

Length of experience does not automatically confer insight and wisdom. Ten years of practice can be one year's worth of distorted experience repeated ten times. The 'experienced' teacher may be caught within self-fulfilling interpretive frameworks that remain closed to any alternative interpretations. Experience that is not subject to critical analysis is an unreliable and sometimes dangerous guide for giving advice. 'Experienced' teachers can collude in promoting a form of groupthink about teaching that serves to distance themselves from students and to bolster their own sense of superiority.

The assumptions outlined above are, in certain situations, entirely valid. Their apparent clarity and truth explain why they are so widely accepted. But, as we can see, there are quite plausible alternative interpretations that can be made of each of them. Central to the reflective process is this attempt to see things differently. A reflective teacher seeks to probe beneath the veneer of a common sense reading of experience. She investigates the hidden dimensions to her practice and becomes aware of the omnipresence of power. ■

From *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995.

Brookfield's Questions

Instead of the One-Minute Paper widely championed in classroom assessment circles, each week Brookfield asks students to complete a "critical incident questionnaire." The answers provide a central part of the feedback reflective practice requires.

The Classroom Critical Incident Questionnaire

Please take about five minutes to respond to each of the questions below about this week's class(es). Don't put your name on the form—your responses are anonymous. When you have finished writing, put one copy of the form on the table by the door and keep the other copy for yourself. At the start of next week's class, I will be sharing the responses with the group. Thanks for taking the time to do this. What you write will help me make the class more responsive to your concerns.

1. At what moment in the class this week did you feel most engaged with what was happening?
2. At what moment in the class this week did you feel most distanced from what was happening?
3. What action that anyone (teacher or student) took in class this week did you find most affirming and helpful?
4. What action that anyone (teacher or student) took in class this week did you find most puzzling or confusing?
5. What about the class this week surprised you the most? (This could be something about your own reactions to what went on, or something that someone did, or anything else that occurs to you.)

(From Becoming A Critically Reflective Teacher, chapter 6, page 115.)

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