

Running Head: PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHING

Personal Perspectives on Teaching Adults

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Assignment #1

May 5, 2007

ADED 4F06

Facilitating Adult Education

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Introduction

There are questions in life that are relatively easy to answer. For example, one could ask, "What is your favourite meal?" For most people this question would require little if any thought and minimal effort to answer succinctly. There are questions in life that are not easy to answer. Questions such as: What does it mean to teach? What does it mean to learn? If someone is taught, does that mean they have learned? Or, if someone has learned, does that mean they have been taught? One's answer to such questions provides insight into an individual's perspective on teaching and learning.

"To choose a (cognitive) perspective is to choose a value system and unavoidably, an associated belief system" (Wikipedia, 2007). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to outline Brian Gould's values and personal perspectives on teaching adults according to the framework provided by Daniel Pratt and Associates (1998). This will be accomplished by outlining his past actions, his intentions and his beliefs and by discussing the "Nurturing", "Apprenticeship" and "Social Reform" perspectives taken from Pratt and Associates framework (1998).

Actions, Intentions and Beliefs

The term "Andragogy" as coined by Malcolm Knowles (1975) refers to "the art and science of helping adults learn" (p. 19). Brian Gould approaches this art and science by delving into his insight and articulates his own teaching model. Indicators of his commitment to perspectives on teaching adults include analyzing actions, understanding intentions and articulating beliefs.

The actions that Brian continues to develop include being open and honest with learners, acknowledging his mistakes, and encouraging questions and offering a variety of learning activities in the classroom. Brian delves into his insight to understand his intentions of demonstrating model behaviour, creating an approachable and comfortable atmosphere and personalizing instruction whenever possible as suggested by Cranton (2000). Integral to Brian's commitment are his beliefs that mere memorization results in rote or surface learning (Cranton, 2000). Further to this, Brian believes that to truly learn requires a combination of application, practice and internalization of facts, skills, behaviours and ideas. Learning and internalization is best supported by "accommodating the learners whenever possible," and "incorporating relevant context for learners" (Cranton, 2000).

Brian displays his commitment to perspectives on teaching within his model. One example of this commitment is demonstrated while teaching the Microsoft Excel Basic course. Brian uses discussions both in and out of the classroom to investigate students existing and prior knowledge of spreadsheets. Through this inquiry process Brian will also be enlightened on how learners are already using spreadsheets, how they intend to use spreadsheets in the future and if they are aware of applications for spreadsheets other than their own (intended) uses. "Learning requires that new knowledge and skills in working memory become integrated with existing knowledge in long-term memory" (Clark & Mayer, 2003, p. 36). Thus, if used effectively this information (about student's prior knowledge) can act as a catalyst for learning by providing context and specific examples for Brian to draw upon when demonstrating tools, explaining ideas and providing examples. Providing context and creating learning situations that are relevant to real life experiences can make the difference between memorization and internalization. As such, "later, when back on the job, the learner must be able to retrieve those skills from long-term memory back into working memory. Without this *retrieval*, learning fails to transfer" (Clark & Mayer, 2003, p. 36).

Similarly, Brian deems it important to appeal to the egos of learners. This is as simple as welcoming students when they enter the learning space, recognizing prior knowledge and applauding their commitment to bettering themselves, their families and society in general. These activities help to prime students for the learning experience. One of Brian's intentions in this process of welcoming and engaging conversation is to expose his true self as an "authentic human being, with feelings, hopes, aspirations, insecurities, worries, strengths, and weaknesses" (Knowles, 1975, p. 33). This approach helps to create a sense of "power with" (Follett, 1924, as cited in Coleman, 2000, p. 111) the learners, combat feelings of "impostorship" (Brookfield, 2006, p. 76) and create an environment where learners believe they can take risks and experiment without consequences. Ensuring learners feel safe, comfortable and respected is a key element to Brian's style of teaching.

A similar approach is used when Brian develops animated worked examples for an on-line version of the same Microsoft Excel Basic course. In this instance, the personalization principle (Clark & Mayer, 2003, p. 136) is applied to learning modules which incorporates animated examples with conversational style audio. The personalization principle tells us that

instruction should not only present information but also prime the appropriate cognitive processing in the learner. Research on discourse processing shows that people work harder to understand material when they feel they are in a conversation with a partner rather than simply receiving information (Clark & Mayer, 2003, p. 136).

Content, context, environment and personalization are four cornerstones in Brian's andragogy and are the basis from which he forms his personal perspective on teaching adults.

Personal Perspectives

It is important to Brian that he teaches effectively and that the learners retain new knowledge. Through his development and articulation of an effective teaching model, Brian analyses and self-evaluates himself through reflection. In reviewing the five perspectives of Pratt and Associates (1998), the two perspectives that Brian closely relates to are "Nurturing" and "Apprenticeship." Furthest from Brian's belief system is the perspective Pratt refers to as "Social Reform" (Pratt, 1998, p. 173).

Nurturer.

Anne Poonwassie writes that, "motivating facilitators understand that meeting the needs of their students is the corner-stone of helping to create a motivating experience for adult learners" (Poonwassie, 2001, p. 154). From a nurturer's

perspective, Anne's statement may serve as a starting point from which to plan a learning experience. Students must be ready and willing to learn in order for teaching to be effective. A nurturer will prime students for learning by making sure the physical environment is appropriate (accessible, comfortable, good lighting, etc.) and that learners feel a sense of welcome, belonging and relevance to their individual needs. When students are comfortable and confident, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to learn. Arseneau and Rodenberg (1998, p. 125) explain that motivations from extrinsic sources are more likely to result in memorization and surface learning. Thus, Brian's actions are motivated by accommodating the learner with the intentions of creating optimal teaching and learning situations. By doing so, his belief is that true learning will occur.

Apprenticeship.

If the apprenticeship model of learning needs to be summarized in two words they are *Co-op Placement*. Some education streams refer to co-op as *clinical placement* or *field placement* and in the corporate world, apprenticeship is known as *job shadowing*. This method of teaching and learning is accomplished by pairing the learner with a seasoned expert in a given field. In nursing, for example, a student nurse is teamed with an experienced professional nurse known as a Preceptor in the

professional health care setting. By doing so, the learner finds a place to practise and perfect their skills, apply new knowledge and experience a day in the life of a nurse, while being mentored throughout the process. A student nurse will study text books on anatomy and physiology or biochemistry extensively (in a formal learning environment) but, it is not until the student becomes steeped in a nursing culture that they transform from student nurse to professional nurse.

Apprenticeship is a "process of enculturation" (Magro, 2001, p. 81) that applies meaning to knowing by modelling, coaching, scaffolding and exploring (Magro, 2001).

For those who learn best by doing, as opposed to reading or watching, an apprenticeship is an effective way to acquire new knowledge, skills and attitudes. Other common examples of apprenticing are martial arts classes, skilled trades, child-care or workplace professional development. Applying the apprenticeship model to every learning situation is simply not possible. Brian believes that one of the best ways to internalize knowledge, skills and attitudes is to engulf oneself in a situation which encompasses the knowledge, requires the skills and embodies the attitudes.

As outlined, the apprenticeship and nurturer perspectives from Pratt and Associates framework are two perspectives that fit best into Brian's personal model. With that said, it is also

prudent to mention the perspective on teaching and learning that is furthest from his own which is "Social Reform" (Pratt, 1998, p. 173).

Social reform.

The over arching message from those who embrace the social reform perspective is to improve society as a whole (Nesbit, 1998). Ethical and moral standards are at the forefront of every learning experience regardless of the content. The elements from this radical perspective (Pratt, 1998, p.174) which are most at odds with Brian's model are that of imposed standards (ethical, social, moral, sexual, etc.) and the potential for an underlying sense of intolerance for ideas that differ from those of the educator. When confronted with situations or messages from this perspective Brian is forced to ask questions such as: A better society for whom? And, who benefits? Ultimately, the danger Brian sees in the social reform perspective is an abuse of power over the student (Coleman, 2000, p. 10). Unless a student has explicitly agreed to participate in a course such as "Social Reform 101," Brian would prefer that the learners have the opportunity to focus on explicit learning outcomes and not implicit rhetoric.

Conclusion

Articulating ones personal perspective on teaching is a complex process that involves critical reflection. The intent of this paper is to outline specific perspectives from Pratt and Associates framework (1998), as they relate to the life and work of educator, and instructional designer Brian Gould.

Furthermore, actions, intents and beliefs from past and current practise were articulated to demonstrate his integration of adult education theories to practice (praxis). Brian is a passionate individual with epistemological beliefs of evolving knowledge, interrelated concepts, improvable ability to learn and gradual learning (Schommer, 1998). His personal perspectives on teaching adults would tell us that teaching and learning are often one in the same. True learning is a circular process which requires the internalization of knowledge, skills and attitudes through a combination of study, application and reflection. Learning is synonymous with teaching and individuals can be taught by experiences, materials, people or any combination thereof. However, teaching can also be an antonym to learning in that poor or misguided experiences usually result in surface learning, poor retention or misguided students.

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