

Chapter LVIII

The Theory and Practice of Teaching in Today's Colleges and Universities

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ABSTRACT

Teaching is changing and it is being forced to change by many forces of social change. Today's theory and practice of teaching in adult and higher education are not only shaped by technology, but also by prevalent teaching and learning theories such as constructivism, progressive principles of education, humanism and even behaviorism. While behaviorism, a major component of pedagogical teaching, successfully dominated adult and higher education in the past, the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that we are experiencing a paradigm shift from being pedagogical in our instruction to an andragogical mode of education in the 21st century due to the fact that we do know, to some extent, how students learn. Therefore, the way knowledge is delivered in the new century must be changed in order to serve the needs of this learning society.

INTRODUCTION

In an era that has been termed as a “knowledge society” it is not surprising that the way that knowledge is delivered has become a focus of attention in today's colleges and universities. Recent debates in post-modern adult and higher education, both nationally and internationally, have focused on the theory and practice of teaching and on raising its

quality and maintaining high standards in student learning outcomes. Towards that end, national and international conferences on college teaching have been organized in North America to address what kind of teaching could lead to the desired student learning outcomes. Teaching, whether it refers to teaching pre-adults or helping adults learn, can be considered both the art and science. Specifically, the art may refer to style of teaching whereas,

the science may refer to method of teaching. As the Concise Oxford English Dictionary shows, teaching itself has traditionally had a number of different meanings:

- To give systematic information to a person, or about a subject or skill.
- To practice this professionally.
- To enable a person to do something by instruction and training (to swim; to dance).
- To be an advocate for a moral principle (my parents taught me forgiveness).
- To communicate, instruct in a moral principle.
- To induce a person by example or punishment to do or not to do a thing (that will teach you to sit down; that will teach you not to laugh).
- To make a person disciplined to do a thing (I will teach you to interfere). (as cited in Jarvis, 2002, p. 11)

It is obvious that the traditional meanings of teaching do convey a theme and a pattern, that is, the traditional definition of teaching indicates that teaching is pedagogical in nature. What pedagogical teaching means is that teachers give systematic information to students about a subject or skill. This requires teachers to be *knowledge providers* and students to be followers of their instructors. Instructors are expected to serve as role models and those students who do not follow instructions are disciplined in one way or the other. To take a closer look at this kind of college pedagogical teaching indicates that it is no different from the art and science of teaching children. Is pedagogical teaching still employed in today's colleges and universities? The answer is definitely a yes. Historically, this was called Russian style of teaching in which instructors were expected to reach a large group of students in the least possible time (Wang & Redhead, 2004). As we look at our general education courses taught in large lecture halls, many teachers seem to have no choice but to

use this pedagogical style of teaching. What seems wrong with pedagogical teaching is the fact that pedagogical teaching places much emphasis on the teachers, that is, it is a teacher-directed mode of education. The teacher-directed mode of education assigns to the teacher full responsibility for making all decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned, when it will be learned, and if it has been learned. It leaves the learner only the submissive role of following a teacher's instructions (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005, p. 62). However, according to Dearing (1997, p. 19), adult and higher education for the 21st century should help achieve the following:

Through the promotion of effective learning and teaching, and enhancing the professional skills and status of teachers, all institutions of adult and higher education give high priority to developing and implementing learning and teaching strategies which focus on the promotion of students' learning.

Dearing's convincing argument has brought our attention to bear on the nature and quality of teaching in universities in terms of lifelong learning. Indeed, we are living in a changing world. In the past, a college degree would provide an individual passport to the modern society. This is not true now! Knowledge increases at an exponential rate. As noted by Knowles (1970, p. 33), "the greatest danger to the survival of civilization today is not atomic warfare, not environmental pollution, not the population explosion, not the depletion of natural resources, and not any of the other contemporary crises, but the underlying cause of them all—the accelerating obsolescence of man." From this vantage point, pedagogical teaching in today's colleges and universities may fail to serve life-long learning in our society. As observed by Lamdin and Fugate (1997), adult and higher education, like all forms of education, is needed throughout our lifetime to help us respond to changes in the nature of work, navigate passages from one stage

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