

Chapter 3

Philosopher or Philistine?

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ABSTRACT

Integrating adult learning and technology is exceptionally challenging. The one certainty present for adult educators is that they can rely on change and therefore catering for learners' needs, interests and abilities is no easy task. In order to be effective, an adult educator must be aware of their own philosophy to cater for this ever increasing diversity. Delivery styles and activities need to be reflective of the philosophy held by the educator and their institution. Although a philosophy may be an eclectic mix, there is usually a key underlying belief which is held by the educator and or institution. Learning will occur most naturally when discussion, activities and direction sit comfortably within their identified philosophy. When teaching approaches are contrary to an educator's philosophy learning cannot be optimized. This chapter outlines well-known philosophies, and teaching approaches which are commonly utilized. By becoming aware of one's philosophy an educator is thus better able to devise learning strategies and situations which cater for the ever changing learners' needs.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

"Teaching is not just a matter of transmitting a body of knowledge to a passive learner. Knowledge is something created in the learning process where teachers, learners, bodies of knowledge and experiential meanings interact" (Usher, 1992, p. 211). In order to support this process the educator

needs to develop a working philosophy by judging and evaluating their beliefs (Spurgeon & Moore, 1997). "It is important then for educators to understand the need for underpinning philosophical frameworks that enable a greater understanding of why they do what they do in the way that they do it" (Hannon, 2006, p. 299). This will require them to determine their goals as an educator and for the learner. Do they believe it is important to impart knowledge or to enable the learner to see

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they have the power to make changes in their lives and community? Both philosophies are valid but will require very different teaching and assessment approaches as the end products are poles apart.

It is important to note that “philosophy doesn’t provide cookbook solutions to the many dilemmas we face in day-to-day practice. However, it can help us to understand ourselves to wisely make certain decisions” (White & Brockett, 1987). It is vital that all educators think about, analyze and use their own respective philosophies. “Philosophy contributes to professionalism. Having a philosophic orientation separates the professional continuing educator from the paraprofessional in that professionals are aware of what they are doing and why they are doing it” (Merriam, 1982, pp. 90-91). “An individual’s philosophy, whether it is explicated or not, affects personal instructional styles or approaches in various ways” (Hiemstra, 1991, p. 9). It is therefore imperative that the educator is aware of their own working philosophy in order to determine which is the most appropriate instructional approach to reflect this. Most people in thought and practice are eclectic and rather than holding rigidly to one philosophy would prefer to use several as a guide for their practice (Howick, 1971; Spurgeon & Moore, 1997). Often the “purposes and context of specific fields of practice will determine the philosophical influences” (Strom, 1996). Flexibility in adapting philosophies can help meet the needs of the adult learner whilst no one philosophy dominates the field (Wang & Sarbo, 2004).

“Wisdom is as hard to hold onto as a friendly butterfly but as basic to a good life as nutrition” (Ohlinger, 1989, cited in Stanage, 1995, p. 278). Wisdom, knowledge, and education mean different things to different people. Each contains aspects which reflect the holder’s viewpoint and philosophy. There are almost as many different philosophies of education as there are educationalists. Most educationalists have a philosophy of education which more closely resembles a patchwork quilt, with numerous philosophies being pulled

together to form something which will guide and mould their own practice. This chapter will outline some of these and then compare and contrast the teaching style that will be demonstrated by the educators holding these philosophies. Finally the chapter will justify the importance for educators to recognize and acknowledge the philosophies they hold in order for them to determine the style of teaching they wish to deliver.

3.2 BACKGROUND

As adult education (andragogy) is explained in depth in an earlier chapter it will only be briefly mentioned here, in order for readers to differentiate between philosophies held by educators of children and of adults. The basis of andragogy has been around for centuries. “In the works of great thinkers, from the sophists, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Renaissance thinkers, via the French thinkers of the Enlightenment, the encyclopedic materialist’s of the Russian revolutionary Democrats, andragogic ideas had a prominent position” (Klapan, 2002). The term andragogy was not coined however until 1833, by the German educator Alexander Kapp. In his book titled *Platon’s Erziehungslehre* (Plato’s educational ideas) Kapp described the lifelong necessity to learn, but did not explain the term andragogy (andragogik) in any depth. The term lost favor and was not used again for nearly a century. In the 1920’s, the term reappeared in Europe and during the 1960s it was used extensively in France, Holland and Yugoslavia (Davenport, 1987). The term was not widely used in North America until Malcolm Knowles (1968) wrote an article titled ‘Andragogy not pedagogy’. Knowles viewed the teacher as a facilitator whose role was to guide adults to become self-directed learners (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982). Knowles (1978) maintained that andragogical principles were also applicable to children who were capable and sought self-direction and for them experience was essential. There has been much controversy

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