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In North America there is a trend toward a new educational orthodoxy that says all teacher development should follow a constructivist path to good teaching. This chapter provides a counter argument based on five different orientations to teaching, learning and knowledge.

Good Teaching: One size fits all? [endnotes 1 & 2]

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Across North America and increasingly the world, there is a move within education to adopt a constructivist view of learning and teaching. In part, the argument for this move is a reaction against teacher-centred instruction that has dominated much of education, particularly adult and higher education, for the past forty years or more. While I do not argue with the basic tenets of constructivism, I do resist the rush to adopt any single, dominant view of learning or teaching. Unless we are cautious, I fear we are about to replace one orthodoxy with yet another and promote a 'one size fits all' notion of good teaching.

My caution is derived from ten years of research, in five different countries, studying literally hundreds of teachers of adults. Across a wide range of disciplines, contexts, and cultures, my colleagues and I found a plurality of good teaching, not all of which rest on constructivist principles of learning. Our findings are not unique. They correspond to those of many other researchers around the world, as far back as Fox (1983) and as recently as Grubb and Associates (1999). In reviewing most of that research, Kember (1997) found a surprisingly high level of correspondence across countries and researchers. No single view of learning or teaching dominated what might be called, 'good teaching.' In our research, we documented five different perspectives on teaching, each having the potential to be good teaching. (Pratt and Associates, 1998) This chapter will introduce those five perspectives, namely: *Transmission*, *Developmental*, *Apprenticeship*, *Nurturing*, and *Social Reform*. Hopefully, this will convince you to resist any 'one size fits all' approach to the improvement or evaluation of teaching.

What is a Perspective on Teaching?

A perspective on teaching is an inter-related set of beliefs and intentions that gives direction and justification to our actions. It is a lens through which we view teaching and learning. We may not be aware of our perspective because it is something we look through, rather than look at, when teaching. Each of the perspectives in this chapter is a unique blend of beliefs, intentions and actions. Yet, there is overlap between them.

Similar actions, intentions, and even beliefs can be found in more than one perspective. Teachers holding different perspectives may, for example, have similar beliefs about the importance of critical reflection in work and educational contexts. To this end, all may espouse the use of higher-level questions as a means of promoting critical thinking. However, the way questions are asked, and the way in which teachers listen and respond when people consider those questions, may vary considerably across perspectives. These variations are also directly related to our beliefs about learning, knowledge, and the appropriate role of an instructor.

It is common for people to confuse perspectives on teaching with methods of teaching. Some say they use all five perspectives, at one time or another, depending on circumstances. On the surface, this seems reasonable. However looking more deeply, one can see that perspectives are far more than methods. In part, this confusion derives from the fact that the same teaching actions are common across perspectives: Lecturing, discussion, questioning, and a host of other methods are common activities within all five perspectives. It is how they are used, and toward what ends, that differentiates between perspectives.

Based on data from over two thousand teachers who have taken the *Teaching Perspectives Inventory* (Pratt and Collins, 2000), we know that over ninety percent of teachers hold only one or two perspectives as their dominant view of teaching and only marginally identify with one or two others. It could not be otherwise, given that perspectives vary in their views of knowledge, learning, and teaching.

What follows is a ‘snapshot’ of each perspective, including a metaphor for the adult learner and a set of key beliefs, primary responsibilities, typical strategies, and common difficulties. Each snapshot is a composite of many representative people. Therefore, it would be unlikely that any one individual would have all the characteristics listed for any one perspective. As you read them, try to locate yourself, not by looking for a perfect fit, but for the best fit. Which of the perspectives seems to capture your own orientation toward teaching and learning? I expect you will find parts of each perspective that ‘fit’ but that the overall profile of one or two snapshots will feel more comfortable than others. A much more detailed description of all five perspectives is provided elsewhere (Pratt and Associates, 1998). You can also access the *Teaching Perspectives Inventory* at: [<http://www.teachingperspectives.com>]

A Transmission Perspective

The Transmission Perspective is the most common orientation to teaching in secondary and higher education, though not in elementary and adult education. From the Transmission Perspective, effective teaching starts with a substantial commitment to the content or subject matter. It is essential, therefore, for Transmission-oriented teachers to have mastery over their content.

Many who teach from this perspective hold certain assumptions and views of adults as learners. Some tend to think of the adult learner as a 'container' that is to be filled with something (knowledge). This knowledge exists outside the learner, usually within the text or in the teacher. Teachers are to efficiently and effectively pass along (teach) a common body of knowledge and way of thinking similar to what is in the text or the teacher.

Such a process of learning is additive, meaning that teachers should take care not to overload their learners with too much information. To increase the amount that is learned, teachers should focus their presentations on the internal structure of the content. This structure can then be used as an effective means of storing and retrieving the material. With proper delivery by the teacher, and proper receptivity by the learner, knowledge can be transferred from the teacher to the learner.

From the Transmission Perspective learners are expected to learn the content in its authorized or legitimate forms and teachers are expected to take learners systematically through a set of tasks that lead to mastery of the content. To do this teachers must provide clear objectives, well-organized lectures, beginning with the fundamentals, adjust the pace of lecturing, make efficient use of class time, clarify misunderstandings, answer questions, correct errors, provide reviews, summarize what has been presented, direct students to appropriate resources, set high standards for achievement and develop objective means of assessing learning. How do effective Transmission teachers accomplish this? What strategies do they use?

Some Transmission strategies include the following: First, Transmission teachers spend a lot of time in preparation, assuring their mastery over the content to be presented. They also specify what students should learn (objectives) and take care to see that resources and assignments are in line with those objectives. Their goal is to pass on to learners a specific body of knowledge or skill as efficiently and effectively as possible. In order to accommodate individual differences, they vary the pace of instruction, sometimes speeding up, other times slowing down or repeating what was said. Feedback to learners is directed at errors and pointing out where learners can improve their performance. Assessment of learning is usually a matter of locating learners within a hierarchy of knowledge or skill to be learned.

As with all perspectives, teachers holding Transmission as their dominant perspective have some difficulties. For example, they often find it difficult to work with people that do not understand the logic of their content. This causes difficulty anticipating where and why learners are likely to struggle with the content. In addition, many whom we studied had difficulty thinking of examples or problems from the 'real world,' outside the classroom, as a means of making their content come to life. And when challenged by learners, they often returned to the content as a means of dealing with those challenges. Finally, in our observations, it was not unusual to see Transmission teachers spend too much time talking. In fact, it seemed that many used learner responses or questions as an

opportunity to talk some more. They were primarily focused on the content rather than the learners.

Much of this sounds negative and, indeed, most of us can think of teachers that were less than stellar and fit well in this perspective. Transmission orientations to teaching provide some of the most common negative examples of teaching. Nevertheless, for many of us there are also positive memories of teachers in our past that were passionate about the content, animated in its delivery, and determined that we go away with respect and enthusiasm for their subject. Such an individual may have inspired us to take up a particular vocation or field of study. Their deep respect and enthusiasm for the subject was infectious. It is the memory of those teachers that must be preserved if we are to see Transmission as a legitimate perspective on teaching.

A Developmental Perspective

The constructivist orientation to learning, mentioned earlier, is the foundation for this perspective on teaching. From the Developmental Perspective, the primary goal of education or training is to develop increasingly complex and sophisticated ways of reasoning and problem solving within a content area or field of practice.

A typical metaphor for understanding the adult learner is the computer. From this perspective teachers need to know how their learners are ‘programmed,’ that is, how they think and what they believe in relation to the content or work. With that information teachers try to build bridges from the learners’ way of thinking to better, more complex and sophisticated ways of thinking and reasoning. The assumption behind this strategy is that learning brings about one of two kinds of change inside the brain: First, when a new experience fits with what someone already knows, it builds a stronger and more elaborate pathway to that knowledge. Second, if a new experience or new content doesn’t fit the learner’s current way of knowing, s/he must either change the old way of knowing or reject the new knowledge or experience. The goal is to change the way learners think, rather than increase their store of knowledge.

Behind this view lies a constructivist tenet that learners use what they already know to filter and interpret new information. In effect, this means that learners construct their understanding, rather than reproduce the teacher’s understanding. Making sense of the world by relating it to what one already knows has implications for teaching. Foremost, it means that teachers must genuinely value learners’ prior knowledge and understand how they think about the content before presenting new material. Once this is accomplished, Developmental teachers employ two common strategies: first, the judicious use of effective questioning that challenges learners to move from relatively simple to more complex forms of thinking; and second, the use of examples that are meaningful to learners. Questions, problems, cases, and examples form the bridge that teachers use to transport learners from previous ways of thinking and reasoning to new, more complex and sophisticated forms of reasoning and problem solving. This, in turn, has implications for the use of the teachers’ knowledge. Developmental teachers adapt their knowledge to learners’ ways of understanding.

It is not easy to teach from this perspective. Teachers trying to change from a Transmission to Developmental orientation will attest to that. For example, asking good questions, the kind that requires time to think and reason before answering, is not easy. And after asking the question, waiting while learners think and voice their thoughts, takes patience. It is difficult to refrain from telling learners, rather than letting them figure it out for themselves, especially when we know the answer. However, the most common difficulty that teachers have when trying to teach from this perspective is in developing practice and assessment tasks that are consistent with complex reasoning. They tend to focus on recall, recognition, and correct answers, rather than on reflection, analysis and reasoning.

Increasingly, we are seeing teachers at all levels of education espouse this perspective on teaching. It has become the new orthodoxy. It is also the basis for much of the progressive movements of problem and case-based learning in the professions. The central commitment to the learner's level of knowledge/skill as a starting point is laudable and effective. However, the progression from espousing to enacting a Developmental Perspective involves much more than a repertoire of techniques for engaging learners in problems and discussion. It also means that teachers must use their knowledge and expertise in ways that do not undermine the goal of helping learners construct their own forms of understanding. Indeed, from this perspective, sometimes less (telling) means more (learning).

An Apprenticeship Perspective

The Apprenticeship view of teaching may be familiar to many, especially those who have gone through an apprenticeship or internship. As we learn more about why so little classroom learning transfers to worksites, this view becomes increasingly relevant. From an Apprenticeship Perspective learning is facilitated when people work on authentic tasks in real settings of application or practice. As you can imagine, this is difficult to do in a classroom. Yet, some teachers have accomplished this in classrooms. (see: Collins, A., Brown, J.S., and Holum, 1991)

Whether in classrooms or at work sites, it is the instructor's responsibility to reveal the inner workings of skilled performance. This is part of the transition Apprenticeship teachers must make when moving from doing the work, to teaching about doing it. Performing is different than teaching about performing. Ask any coach. They must find ways to translate the habituated movement and artistry of performance into language and demonstrations that are accessible and meaningful to learners.

From an Apprenticeship Perspective, learning is more than the building of cognitive structures or the development of skilled competence. It is, as well, the transformation of the learners' identity that occurs as they adopt the language, values, and practices of a specific social group. In the language of collaborative learning and social constructivism this is the same process we take students through when re-enculturating them into a new community of practice way of thinking. (Bruffee, 1999) A useful metaphor for thinking about the learner, then, is as 'outsider' using education and training as a means of entry to

practice. However, from this perspective they are also using education or training as a means of learning a new discourse of action and identity.

Learning, therefore, is a matter of developing competence and identity in relation to other members of a community of practice. Learners' progress is marked by their skilled performance and by their movement from the periphery (as novice or beginner) to the center (as experienced members) of the social life and practices of a community. As new members come into a community, the community itself undergoes changes in defining and enacting appropriate roles, responsibilities, and relationships. Thus, three central tenets of this view are that (1) learning is a process of enculturation; (2) knowledge is socially constructed through participation in a social group; and (3) the product of learning is of two kinds – competence and social identity in relation to the community of practice.

It is the instructor's responsibility to see that learners work on tasks that are meaningful and relevant to the community of practice. One of the principal strategies by which they do this is to break the performance or work into tasks and sequences that progress from simple and marginal, to complex and central to the work of the community. This is called 'scaffolding' of learning. Ideally, all of the scaffolding of learning should be integral to the work and legitimate in the eyes of other workers.

At the same time, instructors have another responsibility – that of reading their learners' point of entry and capability in relation to the work. This is called finding their 'zone of proximal development.' (Vygotsky 1978) In more conventional terms, it means knowing the difference between what learners can do on their own and what they can do with guided assistance from the instructor. This is their zone of development but it is also the teacher's zone of instruction. As learners make progress, the zone moves with the learners, defining new boundaries of autonomous and guided competence.

As learners mature and become more competent, the instructor's role changes. Tasks are still chosen based on the learner's zone of development. But over time, instructors offer less direction and give more responsibility to the learner as learners move from dependent to independent worker. For instructors, making the change from performing while learners watch, to scaffolding the work according to learners' zone of development, is a difficult transition. Finding the right balance between zones of development and scaffolding of work takes time and patience.

Because of this the most common difficulty facing teachers is finding relevant and authentic tasks for classroom instruction. This is usually accomplished with cases or problems drawn from real contexts and situations of practice. However, it is not easy to develop authentic tasks at varying levels of learner competence. Another troubling aspect, even in worksites, is that of matching learners' capabilities with tasks that represent legitimate work. This is one of the keys to good teaching, yet it is encumbered by competing demands for quality work and quality teaching. Issues of safety and quality routinely intrude on teaching. Finally, many instructors find it difficult to put their 'craft' knowledge or skill into words. They will often say, "I know what to do; but

it's difficult telling others how I do it.” This is most common in skill-based occupations but is also a difficulty in jobs that require complex reasoning. The longer we have been doing complex tasks the more routine they become. The more routine they are, the less we need to articulate what we do. We just do it. And that is precisely what learners need to do, too.

A Nurturing Perspective

The Nurturing Perspective assumes that long-term, hard, persistent efforts to achieve come from the heart, not the head. People will become motivated and productive learners when they are working on issues or problems without fear of failure. Learners are therefore nurtured by the knowledge that (a) achievement is a product of their own effort and ability, rather than the benevolence of a teacher; and that (b) their efforts to learn will be supported by their teacher and their peers. The more there is pressure to achieve, and the more difficult the material to be learned, the more important it is that there be such support for learning.

Because many adults come to further education and training with wounds from previous schooling, the working metaphor of the learner here is the ‘Vulnerable Self.’ This metaphor is based on the belief that when a learner’s self-concept is under threat or diminished in any way, learning will be blocked, diverted, or halted altogether. Desired learning outcomes therefore, include more self-sufficient and confident learners, believing in the power of their own actions to achieve the learning they seek. And the primary responsibility of Nurturing teachers is to find a balance between caring and challenging. To do this they promote a climate of caring and trust, helping people set reasonable but challenging goals, and supporting effort and achievement. Above all else, they are cautious not to sacrifice self-efficacy in favor of academic achievement. Success must be clearly and consistently due to learners’ ability and effort, not the benevolence of the teacher, if learners are to become less vulnerable and more competent.

Typical Nurturing strategies include such simple things as getting to know people, consistently listening and responding to emotional as well as intellectual needs, and working with permeable role boundaries, for example, teaching vs. counselling. Nurturing teachers provide a great deal of encouragement and support, along with clear expectations and reasonable goals for each learner. And, their assessment of learning often considers individual growth or progress, as well as absolute achievement.

People often misunderstand this point and assume Nurturing teachers exempt their learners from external standards or examinations. On the contrary, external forms of accountability are presented as reasonable and achievable, especially if they are part of a program or certification requirement. Learners are encouraged to see that it is doing them no favour to be excused from taking evaluations. Instead, they are helped to prepare, usually in small approximations that are both challenging and achievable. Learners are then encouraged to take their tests.

Nurturing forms of teaching are fraught with difficulties. First, evaluation is difficult, especially when institutional expectations run counter to an instructor's perception of what is needed to promote success with learners. Second, for many teachers keeping permeable the boundaries between teaching and counselling is a problem. They often give too much of themselves and, in the end, suffer for it.

In addition, many find themselves defending the Nurturing Perspective against their colleagues' criticisms. Its very name has feminine connotations and to some, suggests lower standards. Yet, for those who are most exemplary of this perspective, there is no lowering of standards. Quite the contrary; they make reasonable demands and set high expectations for their learners. For them, caring does not negate having high expectations.

The balance between caring and challenging is difficult to achieve and sustain, especially with a diverse group of learners. Some Nurturing teachers never do find it and succumb to the most common ailment of this perspective – wanting (too much) to be liked by their students. However for the good teachers, the over-riding goal is to help people feel good about their achievements and to believe in themselves as learners. It is the reversal of these means and ends that most defines this perspective. For Nurturing teachers, achievement is only the means by which people are to improve their self-confidence and self-esteem as learners. Because of this, these teachers are never willing to sacrifice self-esteem on the altar of achievement.

A Social Reform Perspective

Social Reform is the most difficult perspective to describe because it has no single, uniform characteristics or set of strategies. In our research, we found social reform teachers in community development, Native education, AIDS awareness, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the civil rights movement, environmental education, women's health, labour union education, religious education, and even within such established occupations and professions as automotive repair and medical education. In every instance, the teacher we met was either a leader or a rebel.

On first glance, effective Social Reform teachers have much in common with other effective teachers. They are clear and organized in their delivery of content; they bring learners into diverse communities of practice; they ask probing questions and use powerful metaphors that help learners bridge between prior knowledge and new concepts; and they work hard to respect and promote the dignity and self-efficacy of their learners.

These skills and attributes are not, however, the defining qualities of Social Reform teachers. They are, instead, the means by which these teachers work toward a particular set of ideals. It is a particularly strong set of ideals that distinguishes their orientation and is ultimately the measure of their teaching. When Social Reform teachers are effective those ideals are explicitly and profoundly related to the lives of their learners. For the teaching to be judged effective, learners must come to believe that the guiding ideals are

as important to them as they are to the teacher. Social Reform teachers seek not just to interpret the world, but to change it in ways that correspond to their ideals.

Social Reform teachers make three assumptions: First, that their ideals are necessary for a better society; second, that their ideals are appropriate for all; and third, that the ultimate goal of teaching is to bring about social change, not simply individual learning. It is the collective, rather than the individual, that is the object of change. Social Reform teachers are unequivocal and clear about what changes are desired and necessary. They see themselves as instruments of social change and are known, amongst their colleagues and students, as advocates for the changes they wish to bring about in society.

Social Reform teachers encourage students to consider the ways in which they, as learners of the discipline they are studying, are positioned and constructed in particular discourses of practice. Common practices, within a discipline or field of study, are examined for their implicit values and the ways in which those practices reproduce and maintain untenable conditions. Texts and practices are interrogated for what is said, what is not said, what is included and what is excluded, and who is represented and who is not represented in the dominant discourses of practice. Classroom discussion is centred not on knowledge *per se* or how knowledge has been created, but by whom and for what purposes. Subject matter content, therefore, is not just taught; it is interrogated for its complicity in the malaise of society. However, the critical deconstruction of text and common practices, though central to this perspective on teaching, is not an end in itself. The purpose of encouraging students to take a critical stance is to give them power to take social action to improve their own lives.

Teachers who embody the Social Reform Perspective are few and far between. But those that do are very likely to have a lasting impression on us. We may have had a teacher that caused us to question things we took for granted, about ourselves or about society-at-large. It may have been the first critical theory course we took; or a feminist educator we knew; or a spiritual leader that caused us to re-think our deepest assumptions and convictions. In any case, as with each perspective, this orientation to teaching can be wonderful or dreadful, depending upon the quality of teaching and our readiness to embrace its underlying values.

Implications

Perspectives are neither good nor bad. They are simply philosophical orientations to knowledge, learning, and the role and responsibility of being a teacher. Therefore it is important to remember that each of these perspectives represents a legitimate view of teaching when enacted appropriately. Conversely, each of these perspectives holds the potential for poor teaching. However if teachers are to improve, they must reflect on what they do, why they do it, and on what grounds those actions and intentions are justified. Besides resisting a 'One size fits all' approach to development and evaluation, how can these perspectives help in that process?

For several years now, educators of adults have been admonished to reflect critically on the underlying assumptions and values that give direction and justification to their work. For many of us this is not an easy task. What is it that we are to reflect upon? How are our underlying values and assumptions to be identified? In other words, the objects of critical reflection are not self-evident. Indeed, it is something of a twist to look not only at our teaching, but at the very lenses through which we view our teaching.

In our work with educators we use these perspectives as a means of helping people identify, articulate, and, if necessary, justify their approach to teaching. In this process it also helps them thoughtfully revisit assumptions and beliefs they hold regarding learning, knowledge, and teaching. I believe this is what faculty development should be, rather than the mastery of technique. Throughout the process, pre-conceived notions of "good teaching" are challenged as educators are asked to consider what teaching means to them.

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Endnote 1: The author would like to thank Drs. Robert Rubeck and John Collins for their comments and contributions to this chapter.

Endnote 2: I realize the phrase ‘Good Teaching’ is loaded with subjectivity and may be unacceptable to some. However, the word ‘good’ is probably the most frequently used scale point to indicate an acceptable or expected level of performance in learner and peer evaluations of teaching. In most instances, the qualifier ‘good’ corresponds to a quality of teaching that is more than adequate, though not necessarily outstanding or excellent. In my experience, it is also the threshold that all teachers are expected to achieve, regardless of their context or disciplinary home.