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INTERACTIVE TEACHING PRINCIPLES, METHODS, AND SKILLS USED IN ADULT EDUCATION

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Before answering the question of interactions in adult learning it is necessary to distinguish the main techniques involved in it. According to the long-lasting research, fulfilled by the prominent scientists in the field of adult learning, it is possible to point out four key elements engaged in the educational process. These elements, which function as a system, are:

Learner.

Educator.

Subject matter.

Technique.

They are offered as interdependent options which can operate at the same level. It is important to keep in mind that these four elements are integral part of one chain which are dynamic, non-repeatable and unique at any given point in time. Being changeable, they can't be constant and immovable.

Speaking about techniques, it has to be recognized that they have a defined lifecycle. One more essential thing for the educator is to have the opportunity to choose the most suitable techniques during the process of learning or investigation. In his book The Courage to Teach (1998), Parker J. Palmer stresses that a strong inner-sense of self-identity and integrity of an educator are extremely important. He also underlines

that the learning experience must reflect the very soul of the individual. The author assumes that in our attempt to reform education we have forgotten that it will never be achieved by "rewriting curricula and revising texts if we fail to cherish —and challenge— the human heart that is the source of good teaching". Palmer suggests our effectively using the techniques required for each point in time and space and possibility to manage both teaching and learning content. He proposes not to forget about the intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects and their common implementation in the wholeness of reality. He writes that "bad teachers distance themselves from the subject they are teaching—and in the process, from their students. Good teachers join self and subject and students in the fabric of life… Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex weave of connections, among themselves, their subjects and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves." [1,11].

Performing during the learning process and creating the conditions to help the students to learn, the teacher must take into consideration the following essential aspects: a clear sense of identity**,** a humble integrity, an educated heart, a spiritual quest, an authentic respect for the students, a welcome to the voices of truth, an aptitude for asking good questions and listening, a willingness to take the risk of inviting open dialogue.

The next important thing to be kept in mind is "building bridges" between the adult learner and the educator. The first step to understand the student is to take the written information about him or her. Adult learners, as a rule, are very active participants of the process of learning, because they are highly motivated. They like to have their opinions consulted and enjoy having their talents and experience made use of in the teaching situation.

The influence of the adult learners in the selection of techniques should be discussed as two brief aspects. They are: the learning styles distinguished by the prominent theorists of the 20th century and the characteristics of the adult learner given by M.

Knowles. He reflects four key aspects which display certain characteristics that govern the learning process. They are the following:

Orientation to learning.

The role of experience (adults "carry" a great inventory of experiences they can relate to).

Readiness to learn.

Changes in self-concept (as the human being evolves into adulthood).

Several experts in the field of adult learning point out the special tendency to manage knowledge and reflect, act, theorize about it in different ways. They also recognize four learner types such as:

Converger: individuals within learning style proficient at finding practical uses for ideas and theories.

Accommodator: ability to learn for hands-on experience. Learn by doing.

Diverger: best at viewing concrete situations from many different points of view.

Assimilator: best at understanding a wide range of information and putting into concise logical form.

The content of the adult learning is defined historically at macro-social levels. The experts in this field have observed three major tendencies of the content in the formal and non-formal adult education:

Social Focus: emphasis on social justice, democracy, citizenship, ecology, equal opportunities and non-discrimination issues.

Professional development and training: emphasis on corporate development, automation and training techniques for the professional achievements in the global age.

Self-actualization and Spiritual Development: emphasis on spiritual development and holistic views of daily life, work and education.

Technology has changed the way instruction is delivered on the campuses of colleges and universities, especially in terms of online instruction. According to a recent report funded by the Sloan Foundation, Allen and Seaman found that almost two-thirds of all higher education institutions in the United States offer online courses and/or programs in order to remain competitive with other institutions of higher learning and to fulfill the diverse needs of today's busy students [2, 1332]. More and more universities are providing faculty with the tools necessary to incorporate technology into the classroom and move their courses into an online environment. Many instructors take advantage of the new techniques and opportunities made available through online technologies and use them regularly, while others tend to rely on the more traditional methods of delivering course content. For example, Professor Green has taught both online and traditional courses for over three years. He incorporates technology into the majority of his coursework: posts student assignments and documents in the course management system (CMS), uses presentation software and Internet resources, where appropriate, to supplement his lectures, and has moved many of his courses entirely online. He also requires students to contact him through email regarding problems and questions. The purpose of this case study was to investigate faculty perceptions of the usefulness and importance of online technologies, the factors that contribute to the decision of a faculty member to use or not to use the online course management system, and the barriers that exist which make the use of online technologies difficult.

Internal Factors

The most common internal factors that influence an instructor’s decision to incorporate technology in teaching are individual beliefs, feelings of anxiety, fears, preferences and perceptions and feelings of competence [3,25]. The decision to incorporate new pedagogy into teaching is attributed to the instructor’s feelings about themselves and what they have previously learned. Given this, one can extrapolate that if an instructor has a positive attitude or orientation towards technology they will be more inclined to incorporate it into their teaching.

Another way beliefs factor into the decision whether or not to integrate technology is the view instructors have towards various teaching practices and styles. Grasha and Hicks [4, 8] found that teaching styles are based on "the needs, emotions, motives, beliefs, and attitudes of the teacher and that these teaching practices, when used positively, are the force behind student success." Therefore, whether faculty members form their pedagogical beliefs about using technology while they are in school themselves, or after they begin their teaching careers, efforts should be made to improve their interaction with technology early in their careers.

External Factors

External factors include faculty demographics, specifically age and gender, class size, and institutional support. Demographics such as age and gender may be primary factors that influence whether faculty members use technology [5, 96]. In their study, Peluchette and Rust, state that at the university level, faculty who are in the middle of their careers can either be "allies or stubborn opponents as their institutions adjust to competitive pressures, revise programs to meet the needs of increasingly diverse students, and integrate new educational technologies" [6, 201]. Several reasons are provided as to why this may be true. First of all, tenured faculty may not be compelled or motivated to use technology. Secondly, older or senior faculty members may not have the knowledge or training to use technology. This leads to competency issues for older or tenured faculty, as discussed earlier in this study.

Another demographic factor is gender differences. According to Spotts (1997), male faculty members tend to rate their knowledge and use of technology higher than their female counterparts. However, female instructors take factors such as lack of time and lack of professional advancement into consideration when deciding whether or not to integrate technology into the curriculum. Additionally, Lumpe and Chambers (2001) posit from their study that female instructors are more likely to believe that external factors, such as administrators, students, equipment, and professional development, directly influence a person's ability to be successful with technology.

According to Pleuchette (2005), another external factor, class size, can negatively influence technology use. When faculty members use technologies such as email and chat rooms, larger classes can be difficult to manage, especially when teaching an online course.

Institutional support, the final external factor reviewed, encompasses a wide range of topics including faculty development, ease of access for faculty members who wish to use technology, policies and procedures, and support for technological issues. Osika (2006) explained successful technology programs require support from the entire institution. Those most successful and engaged with supporting instructional technology, especially online technologies, were those institutions that included technology support in their long-term strategic plans. It is clear that successfully implementing technology, as well as distance learning programs, into the curriculum is a complex issue facing institutions of higher learning. This issue is complicated further by the various factors which influence instructors' use of technology in a classroom setting.

In the United States, social work faculty and students have been primarily educated in the subject-centered tradition. The teacher exposits; the students listen and take notes. This arrangement is familiar and comfortable to all parties. As resident scholars, faculty aspire to gain expertise in various substantive fields. Lifetimes are devoted to the pursuit of scholarly proficiency. Understandably, our students are presented facts or formulations about what has taken us many years to acquire or develop as if they were obvious, simple and self-evident "truths." The presentation of neatly organized abstractions and classification schemes do not take into account the somewhat less neat and not so logically organized process by which our knowledge and insights have been acquired. Since social work students' field work experiences are rarely as neat and logical as faculty presentations, we offer them material they neither fully understand nor know how to use and unwittingly we may lose contact with them. In contrasting subject-centered and problem-centered education, Knowles (1972) explicates four assumptions about adult learning. These assumptions are particularly relevant for social work professional education. First,

the adult learner is self-directed and has a need to be perceived by others as self-directing. When adult learners find themselves in situations in which they are not allowed to be self-directing, their reactions are "bound to be tainted with resentment and resistance" (p. 34). Second, the adult learner has accumulated life experiences that represent an essential resource for learning. When an adult learner's experience is ignored or devalued, s/he feels rejected as a person. That is so because "to an adult learner, his experience is who he is" (p. 35). Third, timing is an essential factor. Adult learners and, specifically, social work students are ready to learn because of their aspirations for professional careers as well as the immediate demands of field work. Finally, adult learners have a problem-centered approach to learning rather than a subject-centered approach. The social work adult learner wants "to apply tomorrow what he learns today, so his time perspective is one of immediacy of application" (p. 36). Maintaining a working balance between subject demands and student interests and needs should be an ongoing preoccupation for the teacher. As educators we must provide the conditions which facilitate opportunities for students to bridge personal experiences and styles with facts, concepts, and theories. The following represents a more explicit exposition of these andragogical principles, methods, and skill. 1. Creating a climate for collaborative learning: To encourage collaborative learning, the instructor has to create a climate conducive to mutual problem solving. Creating this climate begins with attention to the physical learning environment. The standard classroom set up with a lectern up front and chairs in rows is "probably the least conducive to learning . . . It announces. . . that the name of the game here is one-way transmission . . ." (Knowles, 1985, p. 15). A circle or semicircle arrangement of chairs, desks, or tables immediately announces a different set of expectations–that participation is valued and expected and that something different is going to take place in this class. Class rooms that are well lit, ventilated and clean also promote collaborative learning. Creating a supportive and trusting psychological and social climate is even more important than the physical setting. When students feel respected and trusted by the instructor, they more readily respect and trust each other. In contrast, when students feel a lack of respect and trust, "their

energy is spent dealing with this feeling more than with learning" (Knowles 1985, p. 15). Collaborative learning begins in the first class when the instructor invites student reactions to the course syllabus and encourages their input into course planning. Out of this discussion the instructor and students forge an initial mutual understanding about lines of inquiry, and teaching and learning responsibilities. This initial agreement also serves as a base for periodic evaluations of course content and methods. In developing an initial mutual agreement, an explicit discussion about the instructor's commitment to collaborative learning and an explication of its advantages goes a long way to creating the desired climate. The students' relationship with the instructor as well as assignments and grades also requires discussion and moves the enterprise along. An instructor needs to think about the following initial educational tasks related to engaging the students in collaborative learning:

(a) Class tone: What does one have to do to encourage a spirit of inquiry, of risking, of mutual learning? How does one encourage students not only to learn from the literature, from each other, from the instructor, but also from their most important teachers, their clients? Students have a great deal to offer each other, the instructor's job is to keep the discussions focused, purposeful, and directed. The instructor might consider reserving 10 minutes in each class for an open-ended discussion. For example, if students come across a helpful reading, they can be encouraged to share it without worrying that their classmates will think they are trying to impress the instructor. Similarly, in practice classes, if they come across difficult relevant practice situations and would like some help, they can be encouraged to share it.

(b) Collaborative peer learning: How does one communicate his/her commitment to students learning from each other as well as from the instructor? How does one communicate her/his commitment also to learn from the students? To begin with, the instructor has to be willing to give up the role of being the only expert in the class and that students will learn if one simply tells them. The instructor has to consistently convey her/his unshakable faith that students will be more able to learn,

to think critically, and to venture into new substantive areas when they have been involved in an active, cooperative educational process.

The instructor's tasks include the following:

(1) to keep class conversations focused and directed;

(2) to provide new ideas and perspectives;

(3) to help students find the connections between their field experiences, readings, and class discussions; and

(4) to help students create a classroom climate where they feel invested in each other's learning and in the educational adventure.

In this process, the instructor shares responsibility with the students for their own learning. Students need to be encouraged to help each other to present and develop their ideas while they are in the process of being formed and shaped. As they build on each other contributions, they will create new generalizations, underlying principles, and rationales. Through focused and structured discussions, the students learn to incorporate other's viewpoints and problem-solving methods. In this way, they can help each other with private distortions, biases, and preconceptions. If the process goes well, they will also learn how to work collaboratively–a critical professional skill .

(c) Relationship to instructor: How does one create a classroom climate in which students are direct in their communications with the instructor? Collaborative learning will not be actualized if students are indirect with the instructor. If students are confused, they need to be encouraged to share their confusion. If they desire more lecture and less discussion or the reverse, they need to be encouraged to risk verbalizing their preferences. And most important, students need to be encouraged to disagree with the instructor. Conformity and creativity are antithetical.

(d) Identifying potential obstacles: How does one help students to avoid potential obstacles to their collaborative learning? For example, some students may be

concerned about issues of class confidentiality; others might be concerned about the instructor's fairness in grading; still others might be concerned whether they will be penalized for speaking frankly. Inviting a direct discussion about anticipating potential obstacles places students in a better position either to avoid them or, at least, to develop strategies for dealing with them should they evolve.

(e) Self-directed learning: How does one help students become self-directed in their learning? Obviously, class discussions will only be informative if students keep up with the readings. Students are most likely to be self-directive in their learning if they see the connection between the literature and their becoming skillful professionals. Students need to be encouraged to read to inform and improve their practice. The task is to teach students to read not for the instructor, but to assume professional responsibility to read for the purpose of more effectively helping their clients. Carefully constructed syllabi and opportunities for students to discuss the relevance of their readings help accomplish this task.

(f) Class assignments: What kind of assignments can one develop which will help students integrate theory and practice? In practice classes, aside from term papers, other learning tools such as academic journals, critical incidents, and records of service help students to search for the illusive connections between theory and practice, and between assessment, interventions, monitoring, and evaluation. For example, the critical incident is designed for students to analyze in depth an incident from their micro or macro practice. The analysis requires application of pertinent theory, research findings, and examination of ethical issues as well as self-examination. 2. Providing structure for collaborative learning: How does one provide sufficient focus and direction to class discussions? The instructor must provide focus and direction as well as support and encouragement for students to be willing to share and to risk their ideas with each other. Peer discussion is a means to learning and to critical thinking and not an end on to itself. It is not just through participation in class discussion that students learn, but rather by the structure and quality of these exchanges. Classroom processes have to be structured and the

boundaries defined and contracted within which students interact with each other in pursuit of learning the subject. The structured exchange of different experiences, the sharing of data, the debating of viewpoints, broadens understanding, and alters mental structures. Skillfully asked questions are a primary method for lending structure to class discussions. Gitterman suggests that instructors can:

(1) ask questions in early classes which invite opinions and have no right or wrong answers;

(2) direct students to talk to each other and build on their respective contributions;
(3) deepen the conversation by using more discriminating questions which call for facts, inferences, explanations, and evaluative judgments as student comfort and confidence increases;

(4) periodically pull together and summarize salient themes.

Dealing with obstacles to peer learning: When class obstacles interfere with learning, how does one help students overcome the obstacles? Throughout the semester, the instructor reaches for students' hesitations, concerns, and confusion and deals with obstacles that interfere with peer learning (e.g., monopolist, cliques, withdrawal, competitiveness, illusion of learning, etc.) Class members may lack awareness of obstacles in their learning. When this occurs, sometimes all the instructor has to do is to identify a problematic pattern. For example, "I noticed over the last couple of classes, when class members share their difficulties in inviting a client's intense pain, you tend to jump in with quick reassurances. Are you having difficulty sustaining the painful material and exploring your reactions to it? I am interested in your thoughts on this." Identifying the pattern raises consciousness. If the pattern continues, the instructor can repeat the observation. For example, "Last week I mentioned our flight into reassurance–I think it's happening again–let's look at it." The instructor's directness and persistence convey genuine caring and faith in collaborative learning. Addressing and working on a learning obstacle often releases students' energies and opens up avenues for learning. A discussion that examines the parallels between the obstacles in their class learning with the obstacles that exist

in their practice, between what was done in the class and what they could do in the field, further deepens their learning. Through the discussion, the teacher helps students to become more aware of what s/he modeled in action.

Experiencing abstractions: How does one help students to experience abstractions? As previously stated, theory can be experienced by students as fixed doctrine and as formulations separated from the unorderly process and actual struggle of its creation. New students grasp on to "truths" that they can use in their practice. They begin field work with much anxiety, self-preoccupation, and dependency on their teachers. Fearing that they Alex Gitterman 105 might "drown," they seek prescriptions to help them stay afloat.

Educators must be careful about presenting students with a "closed system" of knowledge, the points fixed and distant from their own experiences. An actual teaching experience in which an instructor was more preoccupied with what he was teaching than with what students were learning may illustrate the negative consequences. A few years ago I was teaching the concept of contracting to first semester practice students. The process I taught was simple, logical, and sequential:

(1) you state the agency's offer of service in clear and operational terms, identifying applicant's or client's potential perception of their interests, needs, or problems;

(2) you state your professional role;

(3) you reach for member'(s) feedback and so on. In response to my thoughtful, well-organized, sequential exposition and to my total surprise and chagrin, I confronted 25 students in a glazed trance, bordering on the catatonic, while others in absent reverie. The instructor had somehow forgotten that the students' practice experiences were rarely orderly, sequential, and predictable. The instructor learned that teaching about contracting is not the same as helping students to struggle with how to contract and how to apply the generalizations to their unique situations (mentally challenged adult, quiet child, angry teenager, etc.). During the next several weeks, the class examined the specifics of their experiences in beginning with

different clients and based on the collaborative work, they were able to develop principles about developing mutual agreements with diverse populations. Students can more capably comprehend and utilize a theory, concept or fact when they have discovered its personal meaning. They require assistance with restoring abstractions to their original states and meanings, and to rediscover them for themselves. Thus, an important teaching objective is to structure situations in which students use the literature, classroom assignments and discussions, and field experiences to facilitate their personal involvement with the subject matter. Educational situations which provide students the opportunity to "catch the point," to experience an "Aha," to capture the pattern of relationships. Personalizing abstractions may become a transformative learning experience. Mezirow suggests that learning from experience leads to construction of revised or new interpretations of both the abstraction and the experience.

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