

Adult education philosophy

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One of the philosophies that is important to adult education is the liberal philosophy. The liberal philosophy, which Socrates is known for, aims to develop intellectual powers of the mind. Having a strong intellectual ability was vitally important to the Greeks. Socrates was a classical Greek philosopher who helped found Western Philosophy.

He was very much interested in ethics and logic. Interestingly, Socrates himself did not write any philosophical texts. All the current knowledge of Socrates' life and study comes from the writings of others, such as Plato. Socrates was very much in favor of oral arguments, and loved debate. He felt that much insight was to be gained from hearing others giving their views on a topic.

Socrates spent much of his life trying to prove that he was not the smartest person. He would debate people over and over again, but he always seemed to have the best and most original ideas. To him, intellectual capacity and prowess was the most valuable quality a person could possess.

Socrates made a huge contribution to the field of education. The Socratic Method, named for Socrates, is a style of debate that is used often in classrooms today. Everyone gathers together and a question and answer type discussion takes place.

As Seiferth (1997) states, the teacher does not give answers, but asks questions. The teacher directs the session of debate by giving each student time to give opinions. As each person puts forth an opinion, it is debated and critiqued by others. This way, everyone can learn from everyone else.

Therefore, it is the students' own brain power that is shaping the lesson. This is a good philosophy for adult students, because they have formed solid opinions and positions on issues. The students' life experiences can greatly influence their ideas. The debate among adult students is often very thorough and can also contain a number of differing opinions based on what the students have gone through in their lives.

Another scholar who was important in education was Skinner. Skinner was a psychologist who made a huge impact on the psychological world with his idea of operant conditioning. He also influenced the educational world because he thought teachers could be taught how to manipulate and motivate students to produce better results. Skinner's behaviorism is still utilized today.

While a graduate student at Harvard, Skinner invented the operant conditioning chamber which studied the rate of response given when reinforcers were present. His findings led to experimental, data-driven research. The associations between an environmental stimulus, and a natural, recurring response, were found to be predictable.

According to Boeree (1997) Skinner found that behavior could be shaped. By giving positive reinforcers every time a desired behavior was exhibited, the behavior could become consistent. A desired behavior became shaped when the behavior began to happen on its own without the needed reinforcer.

Skinner's behaviorism affected not only the field of psychology, but also education. Skinner believed that every student could be motivated, and that behavior follows a predictable pattern. If a teacher gave students a positive

result for a particular behavior, they would repeat that behavior. This is great for teachers because they can use a number of things to motivate students to do their work.

This philosophy works well with adult students because they understand their own motivators. Many adults are back in school to better themselves in their careers, so they are intrinsically motivated to do well. The teachers need only to reinforce those pre-existing ideas that education will lead to a better job, and the students will respond accordingly. The teacher directs and manipulates the outcomes desired by motivating the students with positive reinforcement.

The progressive philosophy aims to promote social change through practical knowledge and problem-solving skills. Active participation by all members of a class is key for the progressive philosophy to work. Class members use their own experiences to learn and draw insight from, as well as coming up with and testing hypotheses. The teacher acts as a facilitator, guiding them through their experiences and evaluating their learning outcomes.

A key scholar of the progressive philosophy is Dewey. His model of learning included five stages: first, the student had to become aware of the problem; next they had to be able to define the problem; then they needed to propose a hypothesis to try to solve the problem; next they had to evaluate the consequences of the hypothesis based on their own experience; and finally they had to test the most likely solution.

According to Zilversmit (2005) Dewey thought the classroom should be a model for the democratic society at large. He felt that teachers should use

the classroom to show students how real-world issues happened, and let them work them out as a true society would.

Dewey believed that real-life experiences were the best experiences for learning. Setting up real-work simulations, actually going out into the world to test a hypothesis and learn about an idea, were the best ways to get a solid foundation of knowledge about a subject. The environment is also very important to the progressive philosophy, because the environment shapes behavior, just as behaviors also create a particular environment.

Progressive philosophy works well with adult students because most often they are already working and living independently in the world. Learning theory from books is useful, but they also need the real-world component to understand the concepts. They need practical applications for the learning they are doing in the classroom that can translate into work experience.

The humanistic philosophy takes the real-world experience of progressive philosophy one step further. In humanistic philosophy, personal growth and development are the most important factors to consider. The students are self-motivated, and the teachers act as guides and aides. They do not facilitate learning; rather, they are a sounding board or advice givers. Humanistic theory focuses on the person more than the subject.

One scholar of humanistic philosophy was Maslow. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs were very significant in the psychological world, and also have implications in the educational world. Maslow found that each person had a number of different types of needs. If a person's most basic needs were not met, he would have trouble being well-rounded and meeting other needs.

The needs in Maslow's hierarchy are as follows: basic needs for survival, such as food, shelter, clothing; safety needs, which include the ideas that one's home and family are safe, and that she has enough resources to live comfortably on. The next level is the need for love and a sense of belonging. After love comes self-esteem, which includes confidence and respect for oneself and others. Finally, the last stage is the self-actualization stage. This includes morality, creativity, and problem-solving.

As stated by Simons, Irwin, and Drinnian, (1987), Maslow argued that if the basic lower levels of need are not met, a person cannot begin to complete the higher levels, and that educators should help students move from one level to the next. Following his theory, someone who is constantly hungry will not be very confident.

This is important for adult learners because there may be some students whose basic needs have never been met. These needs should be dealt with before venturing into the higher levels. Conversely, many adult students will already have their basic levels of needs met, so the class time can be spent on working toward the higher levels and reaching the self-actualization stage.

A final philosophy of education is the radical philosophy. This philosophy puts forth the idea that change is desirable and necessary. The learner and teacher are considered equals as they discuss their own actions and reflect on the consequences of those actions. Much time is spent in discussions when teachers are employing this philosophy. Students' own ideas and thoughts on how to promote change are highly valued, and the group tries to come up with some ways of affecting change on their environment.

A scholar who has been instrumental to this philosophy is Freire. His emphasis on dialog and praxis were very significant to the radical movement. Many scholars have felt that education needs to be the basis on which change is made. Students have always had ideas that would help them, school, or community. The best way to bring about change is to talk about it. He also felt dialog was just words without action, so he believed in praxis, which is putting ideas into action.

Freire believed that the key to change was dialog. According to Smith (2002), Freire felt that through dialog, ideas could be expressed and evaluated in order to deem their possibility. Since dialog is a cooperative activity that involves some basic level of respect, it can be used to great effect. When dialog produces useful ideas that lead to specific plans, great and significant changes can be made. Once dialog has is done and action begins, change takes place.

The radical movement would appeal to adult learners because as adults, they probably view themselves more as equals with the instructors than younger students. Adult students also feel that they have the life experiences to know that some changes would make a great difference in their environment.

Talking about issues that they themselves have had problems with in their lives would lead to great dialog about what could be done to make things better. Adults are also often quite practical; they would be able to come up with plans for action that would be effective and efficient as well.

The liberal philosophy works well in a workplace environment where there is a need to promote higher level thinking. Colleges often use the Socratic Method to get students to think deeply about and debate an issue. In a business, the managers might get together and debate the merits of shorter work weeks.

It is not often used on a daily basis in many workplaces. It can be used in certain situations, but since this philosophy can take time to employ, it is not practical in many areas of work. It is not used much in the military, where ideas are given down from the chain of command, and no debate is allowed.

The behaviorist philosophy can work well in certain aspects of many types of environment. The basic stimulus-response behavior associated with this philosophy can be used to promote good work output. A factory with assembly lines would be a good place for the behaviorist philosophy because workers work as quickly as possible doing repeated behaviors.

This philosophy would also be useful in other organizations where certain behaviors need to be repeated. Employers could use basic conditioning to ensure that all hospital workers washed their hands after entering each patient's room. An appropriate practice and reinforcement would be well-served in this environment. The military is also a great place to see the behaviorist philosophy at work.

Soldiers constantly perform certain behaviors because of the known responses and consequences associated with those behaviors. Behaviorist philosophy does not work well when ideas need to flow freely. An

advertising company thrives on new and unique ideas, so the behaviorist philosophy of producing repeated behaviors would not work well there.

The progressive philosophy works well when there are environmental aspects to the workplace. When workers need to find specific ways of solving problems, or developing step by step procedures for operations, this philosophy is often utilized.

The scientific and project nature Thinking outside the box instead of just taking in information is an important aspect of this philosophy, so creative workplaces will get a lot of use out of it. Hospitals can utilize this philosophy because there are always unique real-life situations taking place in the emergency room. This philosophy promotes that kind of thinking.

The military does not use this philosophy. There is no need for creative thinking is when learning how to walk in formation or assemble a weapon. Workplaces where specific results are needed do not use this philosophy.

Humanistic philosophy is best employed where individual ideas and creativity are valued. Medical research is one area where this philosophy is used to great effect. Group discussion and discovery are highly valued, and that is key to coming up with new ideas to try for new medicines.

Almost every department of a college has a research department, and the people who work there are self-directed, motivated workers whose main objective is discovery. Human Resources departments often use this philosophy as it takes into account feelings and emotional responses. This philosophy would not work well when direct results are needed.

A factory that produces cars does not need to use group discussions very much, as radiators need to be assembled in a certain way to work properly. The military does not use this philosophy very much; the need for personal growth and independence is not as important as the unit.

The radical philosophy would be best used in workplaces where the status quo is not what they are looking for. Government agencies designed to improve or change relations between citizens and police could utilize the dialog and action of this philosophy to great effect. A lot of talking goes into party planning as well.

A party planner would never be able to pull off a successful event without a productive dialog to find out what the client wants, combined with action that produces those desired results. This philosophy does not work well in workplaces where the desired results are already being produced. The military and assembly lines are already producing their desired results, so they have little need for dialog about change.

It has been very difficult to pinpoint my own philosophy of adult education. Each philosophy has pros and cons, and I can see how each would be beneficial in the workplace. However, my own experience has led me more toward the humanistic philosophy. I feel most productive in a group environment where ideas are being shared, and I feel I have skills that would make me a good facilitator of other groups.

I like to listen to other ideas and evaluate their merits. I like to hear what others have to say on a topic that I am passionate about. Therefore, I think the humanistic philosophy fits my personality the best. I am also self-

motivated, and could work well on a project on my own. I have a hard time separating my experiences and feelings from my work, and this philosophy allows me to combine them both to produce good results.

I also see value in the behaviorist philosophy, because I believe that all people have internal motivators, and if I could understand what those are, I could encourage a lot of productivity in the people who worked for me.

I love incentive based projects and reward systems, and think everyone should be rewarded for a job well done. I work well when given a task that I know has a reward at the end, and I think I could also plan appropriate rewards for people who worked for me. Therefore, I think my own philosophy is a combination of the humanistic and behaviorist philosophies.

All five of these philosophies have great value when it comes to adult learners. It is important to understand the scholars who promoted these philosophies, as well as what the philosophies themselves are about. Knowing what practices are employed in each of the philosophies would help any educator understand which one would be best suited to a lesson, as well as the unique group that is adult learners.

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