# Philosophical Assumptions, Adult Learners and Realistic Expectations

## My "hidden curriculum"

Learners according to my philosophy are rather isolated and desperate for a leader, someone who will "seek to adjust the individual" (Kneller, 1971, p. 44) rather than allow them the process to seek fulfillment through means of their own. As the philosophy perennialist comes to mind, I was rather curious to notice that the essentialist theory also stresses the adherence to "predict, change and control students' actions" (Scott, 1998, p.101), yet as my assumed philosophy's environment is rather dour and oppressive, the positive learning space mentioned is not necessarily found or expressly desired. My "hidden curriculum" is that of perennialist; clearly the learner can only acquire knowledge when taught in a traditional setting, didactic and authoritarian. In addition, while sheer "mental discipline" and "perseverance in hard intellectual tasks", (Knight, 1989, p.101) are strongly required, the learners in my philosophy seem to have not quite grasped that skill yet, which according to perennialism, they will need in order to survive in the world as adults. The educational practices within this philosophy also play into my assumptions very well, "the teacher, who is the expert… transmit[s] expertise or knowledge to [the] students" (Scott, 1998, p.100), punishment is not only allowed but expected, creativity is shunned, and significant time is spent on "reading, writing, drill, rote memory, and computation" (Knight, 1989, p.101)

## Yes, but is this my philosophy?

My preferred philosophy when instructing learners is not so dour, (thankfully) and while I am not very comfortable in a completely open environment, the philosophy that jumps out is essentialism; I appreciate hard work, diligence, and an approach that encourages "creative ways"

(Knight, 1989, p. 86) to learning, a slightly progressivist approach that essentialists do recognize. My curriculum has been considered "artful"; a graphic designer by trade I appreciate and enjoy making my education fun, and of course productive. This philosophy coincides with my department's vision and mandate; I use computer technology at will, create instructor led classes that run exactly two hours long, and compliment my materials with graphical illustrations, which is not only appreciated, but in demand. A lot of instructors (I teach faculty and staff at a university) walk away feeling empowered, excited, and optimistic ready to try and experiment with what I have shown them, my most frequent compliment is simply "refreshing". My educational philosophy has no contradictions; the industrialist in me likes to produce "widgets" without frills, redefining the social order is a much larger issue, formal theory without adulations is unimaginable, and a completely open environment, as mentioned above, makes me feel lost. The only concern that I have, is the ability to create online or hybrid courses. Will I still be able to effectively communicate my material or create empowered students that can relate to my curriculum?

**Organizational barriers**

My educational philosophy works very well in class, I can address multiple questions coherently, my inflection is clear, and my quirkiness not only elicits the learners rapt attention but also a few laughs and chuckles. As I progress, my immediate concern now is moving my coursework online. Without the immediate feedback or guided direction that I provide, the learner works in isolation and will become uninterested; it is extremely difficult to "entertain" those who learn at a distance. The word entertain is not meant to be used derogatively, my interests include multiple ways to elicit educational outcomes and for me, trying new innovative

approaches can put the right amount of spark into learning, including those that have accessibility disadvantages.

The first organizational barrier to my working philosophy is that I stress a structured environment; without a way to "control" my users learning path, there will be little cohesiveness throughout the lesson. The strategy that I would use would see the main lessons set up as sequential learning units with self-directed modules to follow after. This would give the learner the opportunity to move around the environment after the first stage has been passed, "play" a bit, and satisfy the non-linear way of thinking. My philosophy of a structured environment would be satisfied, and the tools to learn would all be there, including additional examples, resources, and "help" icons should the learner not "pass" to the next level. Although, not particularly "fun" for the non-linear student, the learning environment can be made extremely flexible, passing to the next level would be a challenge rather than a fight, and the bulk of the learning would be assessed as the learner works through the modules, rather than at one cumulative end. In addition, there would be discussion forums both synchronous and asynchronous included throughout the lessons, and many opportunities to break out in groups should the user wish.

Isolation and lack of communication can also inhibit learners; this organizational barrier is especially true if the nature of learning is expressly online. Interaction within the course is essential, though it can become frustrating if the communication venues are not properly set up or learners that have various vocabulary skills, such as English as a second language are not adapted for. My strategy (and working philosophy again accommodated) would include a pre-assessment that would not only asses the users English skills, but also determine if the user can handle an online course and be comfortable working within a distant learning environment.

Secondly, providing clear instructions about online communication included within the syllabus and / or announced within each discussion board forum would be mandatory. The instructor can also request that students email during specific times, and allow for moderators to respond to students needs as necessary. If the guidelines are clear from the beginning, including a persistent place for glossary and site map, questions from students will be considerably less time consuming, and more meaningful. Requesting that students talk to each other first before emailing the instructor can also cut down on response times.

Lastly, an organizational barrier that has (finally!) been formally recognized is inclusivity for those that have accessibility disadvantages. The strategy that I will provide will be radical, but it still works within my essentialist philosophy, that insists on structure and progressive learning stages. As mentioned earlier, we are moving towards the business of entertaining learners. This realization has impacted many adult educators, essentially becoming interested in the learners "environment", notwithstanding adapting the content itself. The strategy that I am suggesting is using a "gaming environment"; accomplishing both challenge and engagement at every turn. While I do feel that some games set out to only accomplish one goal (Loeppky, 2006 ¶ 5) the challenges and strategy that these online games exhibit, can in fact be tailored to move content towards the user; learning with or without being so explicitly straightforward. There are studies that have shown users with disabilities and special needs participating with and enjoying a gaming environment. (Loeppky, 2006) In fact, without the physicality of classrooms or trained guides, we have found that these learners "exhibit…positive social and cognitive skills that he would [be] rarely demonstrate[d] in a traditional classroom environment. (Loeppky, 2006 ¶ 4) Another plus, and this one is the most crucial, is that all gamers in this environment are fully active and "abled" in games. Using avatars and becoming "portal master" allows for all users to

be "equal"; each individual advances by skills sets available to everyone and on an equal playing field.  Technological advancements have made much progress, and this technique may be slow into coming, but my intuition is, that this way of learning will be made increasingly available and in time, become the preferred online mode to those whose accessibility concerns would have been otherwise difficult to address.

Certainly, my list is not inclusive of all the barriers that may inhibit or obstruct a learner's ability to become engaged or to simply learn. In the end, my goal is to create an atmosphere conducive to learning, with the added bonus of having the learner acquire experience, a positive attitude, and achievement.

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