

Teaching Perspectives

BYU - Idaho

Five Perspectives on Teaching

“What does it mean ‘to teach?’” asks Daniel D. Pratt. To answer that question, Pratt studied 253 teachers of adults to try to understand what teaching means.

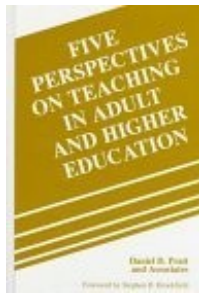
Pratt focused his questions about learning, motivation, the goals of education, the nature of the learners, and outside influences on teaching.

From the teachers’ responses, Pratt reveals five different perspectives on teaching which become the foundation for his book *Five Perspectives on Teaching in Adult and Higher Education*.

The five different teaching perspectives are

1. Transmission
2. Apprenticeship
3. Developmental

4. Nurturing
5. Social Reform.



These multiple perspectives suggest there is no single, universal perspective on teaching adults.

Pratt claims these perspectives, then, govern what we do as teachers and why we think such teaching actions are worthy or justified.

He also encourages that an important way to develop as teachers is to examine

thoughtfully on what we believe about teaching, about learning, and about how we teach.

Each perspective on teaching is a complex web of actions, intentions, and beliefs; each in turn creates its own criteria for judging or evaluating right and wrong, true and false, effective and ineffective.

The following pages make generalizations about the characteristics of the five perspectives regarding teachers’ roles, learners’ responsibilities, and common difficulties with each perspective.

(The following information comes directly from Pratt’s book without the use of quotation marks.)

Language & Letters

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General Model of Teaching

Daniel Pratt provides a general model of teaching that directs each teaching perspective. The model contains five basic elements:

1. Teacher: How do you define your role and responsibility?

2. Learners: How do you describe your learners?
3. Content: How do you decide what to teach and what should be learned?
4. Context: How do you locate your teaching

5. Ideals: Can you name any ideals, beliefs, or values that influence your teaching, and which would be important to understand as a reflection of you?



Transmission Perspective *Delivering Content Effectively*

Effective transmission teaching is defined as teacher mastery over content combined with expertise at incorporating various teaching skills to deliver that content. Effective transmission teaching is further defined as delivering content efficiently—within the time constraints and other parameters set by the institution and individual program or course sponsors.

Effective transmission teaching consists of a set of skills

that can be acquired, improved, and extended. These skills include lecturing, small group teaching, laboratory teaching, and research and project supervision among others. They implicitly suggest, however, that these skills will be of little value if the teacher is not a content expert.

Teachers also require deep subject knowledge so they will be able to think and problem-solve, to analyze a topic, to reflect upon what is an

appropriate approach, to select key strategies and material, and to organize and structure ideas, information, and tasks for students.

Without content mastery, teachers will not be able to present a wide range of examples, answer student questions well, provide useful resources, or design assignments that reinforce course objectives.

“The Transmission Perspective teacher is a content expert and skilled presenter.”

Learners and Transmission

Transmission teaching recognizes that student learning and personal issues affect one another. This perspective clearly places personal student issues second to efficient course delivery. Teachers are hired for their content expertise, not counseling skills.

The purpose of teaching, from a Transmission Perspec-

tive, is to move knowledge or skills from a content expert (teacher of text) to the learner.

The teacher’s function is to show learners the right or better path to the knowledge or skills they seek to apply in future careers. Teachers assume that learners are there for a purpose: to learn skills and pick up the knowledge

base needed to gain entry-level job positions in careers of their choice. The ideal learners in a transmission teaching setting are those who know exactly why they are there and what they want to do with the skills they learn.

Common Difficulties with Transmission

At its best, teaching from this transmission perspective can be compelling and engaging because the content itself is gripping, or because the teacher is entertaining. Yet there are many teaching from this perspective who are not entertaining or engaging.

Many who teach from this

perspective pride themselves on their expertise, knowledge, proficiency, and skill, much of which has become automatic to them. One of the most difficult aspects of teaching, for such people, is to empathize with learners who don’t understand the content.

For many teachers, this trans-

mission perspective, may be the only perspective they have ever known. It might have been the dominant perspective governing their own learning. They may have adopted this perspective without question., they may not anticipate where in the content and why learners will have difficulties.

Apprentice Perspective

Modeling Ways of Being

Teachers holding the apprentice perspective as their dominant perspective are, first and foremost, expert practitioners. Individuals are given responsibility for teaching others about their expertise, whether in kitchens, physics labs, operating rooms, or classrooms. Experts are the role models, and learners are the observers of their expertise in action.

As learners spend more time observing, and gradually participating, the instructor con-

tinues to model more of what is to be learned, while also coaching learners and bringing them into more active roles as members of the community of practice.

Coaching is a combination of demonstrating, scaffolding, giving feedback, and gradually fading support and direction as learners mature in their knowledge and expertise.

There is a profound respect for the contest of practice as

the only legitimate site for learning and teaching. Effective teaching, for apprenticeship teachers, means knowing how and when to give learners more responsibility and more diverse roles, so as to push them toward their potential but not to exceed it.

Through this process, learners are expected to acquire not just the skills and knowledge of their community, but the confidence that comes with an identity of mastery.

Learners and Apprenticeship

Knowledge and authority in the apprenticeship perspective is often equated with experience or time within the community or discipline. Learning is understood to be a process of socialization into the beliefs and values of the community.

Learners are expected to work alongside their teachers, tak-

ing on different roles and experiencing different kinds of engagement in the work and business of community. Eventually, learners must spend time in real, rather than simulated, situations of practice if their knowledge is to be credible.

Learning is the acquisition of information and procedures so

they can be used or applied in practice.

As is typical of many traditional apprenticeships, knowledge and experience occurs as a learner moves from the periphery to the center of a community's defining activities. For many teachers this means directing the content and process to community

“The Apprenticeship Perspective teacher is as a role model and coach.”

Common Difficulties with Apprenticeship

For those teaching in classrooms, it is difficult to find authentic apprenticeship tasks for learners. Through simulations, case studies, problem-based learning, and role plays, teachers attempt to bring more reality into the relatively sterile environment of a classroom. Yet even that is defi-

cient, devoid of the whirl and pace of actual working environments.

Teaching from a dominant perspective of apprenticeship requires an ability to scaffold or parcel out the work in ways that permit any learner to legitimately participate in the work to be done.

Yet, this is not easy; even when teaching in authentic contexts, it is difficult to dismantle the complex structure of one's knowledge and then scaffold it in ways that allow learners to participate at points of entry that are both meaningful and achievable.





Developmental Perspective *Cultivating Ways of Thinking*

Effective developmental teachers act as guides or co-inquirers, building bridges between learners' present ways of thinking and more "desirable" ways of thinking within a discipline or area of practice. Bridging between these two forms of knowledge means teachers must be able to identify and then reconstruct essential concepts in language and at levels of meaning that can be understood by learners.

In addition, learners' conceptions of knowledge and ways of thinking must be respected, even though they are incomplete or incorrect. Thus, instead of working to pass along information and get information across, these teachers introduce learners to the essence of their content in ways that engage what people already know and challenge their ways of knowing.

Within the Developmental Perspective, the focus of pow-

er begins to shift from being predominantly with the teacher, to a sharing of power with learners in two ways.

First, the process of learning (and teaching), is assumed to start with what the learner already knows, that is, prior knowledge or conceptions of the content.

Second, because learning is assumed to be a change in understanding, learners must feel safe as they learn.

"The Developmental Perspective teacher is guide and co-inquirer."

Learners and Developmental

In this developmental perspective, students' prior knowledge is key to learning, and that prior knowledge must be activated. Learners must be actively involved in constructing personal meaning and understanding. The links students make with their learning are more important than what they are learning.

This perspective emphasizes a *qualitative* change in learners rather than a *quantitative* one; learning has to do with knowing *differently* rather than knowing *more*. Therefore, the teachers' role is to lead the learners from their existing conceptions to the preferred conception.

However, making those links

requires time and a stronger focus on intrinsic motivation and deep learning more than on extrinsic motivation and surface learning.

Teaching should be geared toward making the teacher increasingly unnecessary: that means, the development of learner autonomy as well as the intellect.



Common Difficulties with Developmental

Within this developmental perspective, it is necessary for teachers to explore students' current conceptions of content and then challenge those conceptions as a means of helping learners move to more sophisticated levels of thinking and reasoning. This is not always easy.

A common tendency for beginning teachers within this perspective is to fall back into the role of "expert" and provide more answers than challenging questions.

But perhaps the most difficult challenge for teachers in this perspective is to develop means of assessing learning

that are congruent with the beliefs and intentions of this perspective. While teachers may be able to bridge from the learner's prior knowledge to more desirable ways of understanding and thinking, they may not be able to develop assessments showing how that thinking has changed.

Nurturing Perspective

Facilitating Self-efficacy

Nurturing educators try to be both a friend and facilitator to their learners. As friend and facilitator, teachers have a delicate balancing act—they must be both caring and challenging toward learners.

For teachers standing most firmly within this perspective, the combination of caring and challenging gives direction to their role and responsibility. It also characterizes an effective relationship between teacher and learners.

Influential learning is more emotional than cognitive and is more central to the learner's self-concept than to his or her cognitive structure. When teachers from this perspective look at learners, they see a whole person who brings an emotional as well as intellectual, past to the existential moments of learning.

Within this perspective, teachers reveal a sense of personal regard for the welfare of learners, both inside and out-

side the formal learning environment. It is not derived from a sense of duty or obligation, nor from professional or institutional goals. Rather it is derived from an ethic of caring, a form of commitment and genuine regard for the other.

Such teachers are clearly committed to the whole person, that has come to them as a learner, and certainly not just the intellect of the person.



Learners and Nurturing

Three basic principles of nurturing relate to learners and their environment. First it must be a trusting and safe place where learners can take risks and not be humiliated or diminished for mistakes.

Second, it must be a place where learners can attribute success to their own effort and ability, rather than luck of the

sympathetic kindness of a teacher.

Finally, it must be a place where the relationship between learner and teacher is both caring and challenging.

Collectively, these beliefs bring the emotional aspects of the learner into sharp relief for the first time. Because learn-

ing is believed to be an emotional, as well as cognitive, engagement, the environment must be a place where people can express emotions as well as thoughts, fear as well as joy, uncertainty and confusion, as well as insight. Learners must never feel their self-esteem or dignity is under threat

“The Nurturing Perspective teacher is a facilitator and friend.”

Common Difficulties with Nurturing

A difficulty with nurturing is implementing assessment procedures that run counter to nurturing commitments and beliefs. As a result, teachers who care deeply about their learners struggle to meet external requirements while trying to ease the wounding that can come from yet another

low achievement score on an important test.

Because these teachers focus on the emotional wholeness of the person, they often slip into the role of counselor which means some nurturing teachers succumb to exhaustion and burnout from trying to be all things to all people.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of being an effective nurturing teacher is that of reconciling the apparent (though not true) contradiction between caring about learners while also holding them to reasonable expectations of work and achievement.



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Take a short questionnaire to help you summarize your views and perceptions about teaching.

teachingperspectives.com



LANGUAGE & LETTERS

*“The Social Reform
Perspective teacher is an
advocate for an ideal.”*

Social Reform Perspective *Seeking a Better Society*

Teachers holding a Social Reform Perspective are most interested in creating a better society and view their teaching as contributing toward that end.

Social reform education’s agenda may be social change, but its immediate goal is to get people to look more closely at what they know and examine more carefully their common sense understandings about the content.

The teacher is trying to, first, discover with the students which is most problematic about their perception or understanding. From the vantage of ideals espoused by a social reform teacher, his or

her primary role is to pose problems or to make problematic that which is taken for granted. By posing problems, educators expect to learn how to ask deeper questions and research thoughtful answers as a means to action.

Most social reform teachers announce their ideological partisanship as an integral part of their teaching agenda. In the early sessions of teaching, they make clear their political, moral, or social commitments and their relationships to the process and outcomes of teaching and learning. Teachers are not only clear, but very often unyielding in their commitment to their ideals, which

are an essential aspect of who they are as people and teachers.

Common difficulties associated with the Social Reform Perspective may include the zeal and passion of the teacher which conflicts with the values of the learners. Another difficulty for the teacher is to maintain a high degree of consistency and congruity between their ideals and teaching behavior. It is one thing to champion an ideal; quite another to live that ideal. Teaching is in grave trouble when there is a disparity between the teacher’s words and actions.