

Part 2

Teaching in Cyberspace – What's your Style?

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Many of you desire to teach because you have experience in a specific area as well as a

Masters degree, and this is a great way to begin your career as a virtual instructor. Others of you may just want to make some extra money teaching. Hey, I am all for it, there is no rule that says teaching should be your chosen profession. Whatever your reason for wanting to teach, there are certain things that you need to understand about virtual learning environments.

The first thing that you must understand is that the virtual learning environment is in a phase of self-adjustment. This means that the area is growing so quickly that there has not been enough time to regulate it or to create consistency. Where some schools continue to use traditional pedagogic methods such as tests and memorization techniques, others are working in an andragogical environment that embraces case studies, student knowledge, and experiences as the basis for instruction and it is to your advantage to understand how these different focuses work. That is, if you want to work.

Your style corresponds directly to the way you teach and assess the learning of your students. For example, do you prefer to use exams to assess how your students understand the concepts? Is an essay your preferred method of evaluation? Do you prefer that your students utilize their own work environments in order to explain the concepts? These are all valid questions that you must consider before you start teaching. You should also know if your university uses a preferred methodology. You certainly don't want to preach a pedagogic method if the school is using andragogical techniques in their learning model.

Elemental Models



In the beginning, there were teachers, teachers taught the students, and the students believed the teachers because the teachers were “*all-knowing*” academics and for this reason, what they taught was the law! We begin our journey into philosophies with a look at the basic concepts of teaching models. Think back to those days when you were a young child in elementary school and you experienced your first community interactions in a learning environment with other children the same age. You sat a desk with a lid that opens with a place to store your books, pencils, crayons and lunch. The “*all-knowing*” teacher taught every subject, math, English, social studies, art and what ever else they taught in those days. The all-knowing teacher sat or stood at the front of the room with chalk in hand to teach you the elementary concepts that would travel with you for the rest of your life. You raised your hand to ask a question, you raised your hand to answer a question, and you even raised your hand for permission to use the restroom. You relied on the “all-knowing” teacher to tell you when, where, how, and why, because after all, she/he was all-knowing. Your first six to eight years of education followed this routine.

We continued the journey with (*with these childhood educational experiences in tow*) into our college courses. Again, we witness the professor or assistant professor as the “*all-knowing*” subject matter expert and take what they say as the gospel, because up to that point our experiences and knowledge still have no place in learning.

Each of these phases of our early educational development fall into the traditional pedagogic experience, the teacher is the actor and the students as the audience. The classes evolve around the instructor more so than the student, and represent the elemental models of education. Elemental models look at education as reactive and adaptive (Knowles, 1998) in a manner that is reminiscent to stimulus response (Thorndike, 1898; Pavlov, 1902) and do not take into account the desires and

needs of the learner. The elemental models do have a place in learning and should not be discounted, although whether that place fits into to adult education may be questionable. The authoritarian approaches to teaching remain predominate in academic institutions. Keep in mind that these are the models that most adult learners experienced as young learners. These are also the experiences and assumptions that they bring with them into the virtual classroom. They are prepared to once again be the audience and allow the instructor to take the lead role. However, these assumptions are short-lived as adult learners realize that in the virtual classroom, they must take on the role of the actor and the instructors take on the role of the audience.

Holistic Models



Holistic ideas in education have been around a long time. However, the bureaucracy involved with using these types of models made it virtually (*pardon the pun*) impossible to initiate them into classrooms in the first half of the 20th century. In the late in the 20th century, some of the earlier ideas that were once considered outlandish were pulled out of the attic, dusted off, and given a second look.

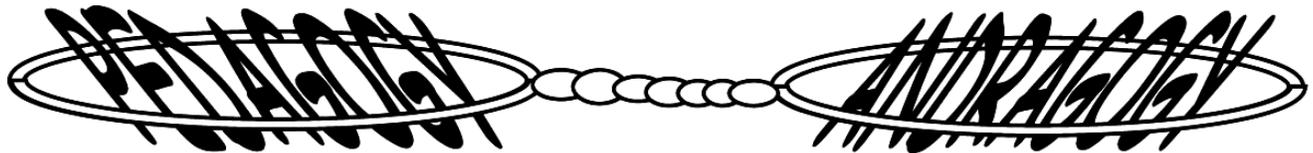
In the eighties and nineties, we began to see a shift in both primary education and secondary education where some schools began to incorporate more holistic methodologies into the educational structures. In these models, the student becomes the focus and concern and the emotional well-being of the student began to receive attention in their early learning years.

In Kansas City where I grew up, we saw the development of the “Magnet” school. These schools focused on primary areas of interest in the children. For example if a child had musical aptitude she could attend a school that focused on music as the main curriculum but also covered the primary requirements of English, math, science, etc. The idea, which was revolutionary for its time, is still in existence today. However, not all of the schools embrace this type of methodology and the

school system now offers both traditional learning environments and magnet learning environments while the debate continues as to whether these approaches are better or worse, and as a result, we have teachers that use both elemental pedagogic approaches and others the use holistic andragogical approaches. Talk about confusion!

The traditional model of “Shut up and Listen” no longer applies to adult learning in the 21st Century and although enrollments in college programs are on the rise is it possible that enrollments would be even higher had they had more holistic experiences in early childhood? A good philosophical debate here, don’t you think?

The tug of ware between Pedagogy and Andragogy



Pedagogy

- Instructor as Main Character
- Prepares for the next level of education
- Tests, memorization, theory
- Initial focus on teaching children
- Required learning
- Definition: The art, profession, or study of teaching. (NCES,2006)

Andragogy

- Student as Main Character
- Prepares for real life application
- Case study, team work, essay
- Initial focus on teaching adults
- Desired learning
- Definition: The study of delivering instructional material to adults.

(UNO,2006)

The confusion between pedagogy and andragogy as well as the opponents and proponents of the two styles is a difficult barrier to overcome as an instructor. Understanding that a mixture of the

two styles may be predominant in some institutions will reduce the stress of conformity to either and allow the instructor to determine the direction of their classroom.

The newness of the virtual academic environment creates a division between the ways of the past and the needs of the future. Where pedagogy prepares the student to continue to the next level of learning, andragogy prepares the learner for hands on real life scenarios. In addition, the androgical instructor takes on the role of the mentor and the communication that exists between teacher and learner is based on a “partnership.” Marshak (1983) offers some enlightenment between pedagogy and andragogy and the solutions of mixing the methods.

The advocates for andragogy need to recognize that accrediting institutions require certain pedagogical elements in learning environments including virtual classrooms. These requirements alone will not allow a curriculum based entirely on andragogical methods and there are still learners that prefer pedagogical methods to andragogical methods. The adjustment from traditional to virtual classroom requires the instructor to take a second look into non-traditional teaching styles.

(Clark,2005) Are pedagogical methods suitable for the virtual environment or is there a division between what works for in traditional brick and mortar environments versus virtual? Oliver (2000) explains, “Online learning and teaching is harder to characterize, due to its relatively short history and diverse forms of implementation.” Although the styles are quite different, you may find that as you as you teach in cyber space, a need to combine the two methods depending on the needs of the student and curriculum. So make like a boy scout and “be prepared.”

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