1.2: WHERE DO I FIT IN? ARTICULATING A PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY

“He who has a why to live can bear almost any how.” —Friedrich Nietzsche

Each teacher brings a unique philosophy and viewpoint to their interactions with students. Some of these views are more obvious than others. For example, some teachers might state that they choose teaching to help and support new members of their profession. Others may note that involvement with learners is a required and expected job requirement. Taking time to reflect and begin to articulate a personal philosophy of teaching can help teachers understand why they approach their practice in particular ways and how their individual views fit with ‘big picture’ educational issues. Understanding why a teaching approach or action might be advantageous before deciding what content to implement or how to deliver that content helps teachers think critically about their practice.

Any philosophy or expression of beliefs can evolve and grow over time. As teachers strengthen their theoretical knowledge and gain practical experience, their personal teaching philosophy will also change. Although it can seem daunting to try and put beliefs into words, initiating a working teaching philosophy statement and then adding to it throughout your career can support teachers in becoming more engaged, competent and scholarly (Chism, 1998; Goodyear & Allchin, 1998; Owens, Miller & Owens, 2014; Ratnapradipa & Adams, 2012; Schönwetter, Sokal, Friesen & Taylor, 2002).

For clinical teachers seeking to identify where they fit in and how best to articulate a personal philosophy of teaching, established philosophical perspectives from the field of adult education offer important direction. Liberal, progressive, behaviourist, humanist and radical perspectives are traditionally considered foundational. Each of these overarching perspectives brings different underlying assumptions about human nature, the purpose of education, the role of the educator, and the role of the learner. Perspectives specific to teaching, such as transmission, apprenticeship, developmental, nurturing and social reform perspectives, provide more explicit guidance for those in higher education. In
this chapter we provide a primer on key adult educational philosophies and discuss the process of articulating a personal teaching philosophy statement.

A Primer on Key Adult Education Philosophies

Five Key Adult Education Philosophies

An adult education philosophy or perspective is the categorization of an individual’s beliefs, values and attitudes towards education. In this section we present Elias & Merriam’s (1995) seminal work identifying the five key adult education philosophies of liberal, progressive, behaviourist, humanist and radical perspectives.

A **liberal** perspective emphasizes the development of intellectual abilities. Liberal education is related to liberal arts, not to liberal political views. A liberal arts education provides general knowledge with an emphasis on reasoning and judgement, instead of professional, vocational or technical skills (Liberal Arts Education, n.d.). A liberal education promotes theoretical thinking and stresses philosophy, religion and the humanities over science.

Liberal teachers are experts who transmit knowledge, direct the learning process with authority, and emphasize organized knowledge. Teachers play a prominent role in this philosophy and have a variety of different intellectual interests. Teaching methods focus on lectures, readings, study groups and discussions. Socrates, Plato and Jean Piaget are considered liberal teachers.

A **behaviourist** perspective emphasizes skill acquisition. Behaviourist education conditions and shapes individuals through clearly defined purposes and learning objectives. Heavy emphasis is placed on assessing and evaluating whether behaviours taught have been learned.

Behaviourist teachers manage learning environments in ways that promote learning of expected and desired behaviours. Although teachers reinforce or positively acknowledge students when they succeed, both teachers and students are accountable for learning success. Mastery learning and standards-based education are often framed from a behaviourist perspective. Teaching methods include programmed instruction, contract learning and computer-guided instruction. Ivan Pavlov, Burrhus Frederic Skinner and John Watson made significant contributions to this perspective.

A **progressive** perspective emphasizes an experiential, problem-solving approach to learning. Progressive education liberates learners and equips them to solve problems and apply practical knowledge. Students learn by doing, by inquiring, by being involved in the community and by responding to real-life problems.

Progressive thinking is grounded in five principles. First, education is viewed as a life-long process and not one restricted to formal classroom instruction. Second, learners have the potential to learn more than their immediate interests. Third, learners value diverse instructional methodologies. Fourth, teacher–learner relationships are interactive and reciprocal. Fifth, education prepares learners to change society.

Teaching methods include the scientific method, problem-based learning and cooperative learning. Proponents of this perspective include John Dewey, Francis Parker and Edward Lindeman.

A **humanist** perspective underscores personal growth and development. Humanistic education supports learners
towards becoming fully functional and self-actualized. Humanists believe that individuals are autonomous and have unlimited potential that should be nurtured. They also believe that individuals have a responsibility to humanity.

Learners are viewed as highly motivated, self-directed and responsible for their own learning. Humanist teachers facilitate and partner with students rather than managing or directing their learning. “Humanist adult educators are concerned with the development of the whole person with a special emphasis upon the emotional and affective dimensions of the personality.” (Elias & Merriam, 1995, p.109).

Teaching methods include team teaching, group tasks, group discussion and individualized learning. Theories developed by Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and Malcolm Knowles ground this perspective.

A radical perspective highlights social, political and economic change through education. Rather than working within existing norms and structures, radical education often occurs outside mainstream adult and higher education programs. Radical educationalists value non-compulsory and informal learning activities.

Radical teachers coordinate, make suggestions and partner with learners. They do not direct the learning process. Teaching methods include exposure to the media and real life situations. Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich and John Holt are well-known radical thinkers.

**Table 1. Philosophies of Adult Education**


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PURPOSE OF EDUCATION</th>
<th>LIBERAL</th>
<th>BEHAVIORIST</th>
<th>PROGRESSIVE</th>
<th>HUMANIST</th>
<th>RADICAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ROLE OF TEACHER</td>
<td>Experts who transmit knowledge, Direct the learning process.</td>
<td>Manage, control and positively reinforce, Predict and direct learning outcomes.</td>
<td>Organize, guide and establish reciprocal relationships with learners.</td>
<td>Facilitate, support and partner. Attentive to emotional and affective issues.</td>
<td>Coordinates and suggests but does not determine direction of learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUTHORS</td>
<td>Socrates, Plato, Plaget</td>
<td>Pavlov, Skinner, Watson</td>
<td>Dewey, Parker, Lindeman</td>
<td>Rogers, Maslow, Knowles</td>
<td>Freire, Illich, Holt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXAMPLES</td>
<td>University or college lectures.</td>
<td>CPR certification and renewal.</td>
<td>Problem-based health care programs.</td>
<td>Clinical pre and post conferences.</td>
<td>Literacy training.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My Favourite Philosophies

Review each of the boxes in Table 1, Philosophies of Adult Education. Put a checkmark beside any comments in the boxes that seem to resonate for you. Do your checkmarks fall into one or two favourite philosophies? Do some philosophies seem to better fit you than others?

Philosophy of Adult Education Inventory (PAEI)

Building on the five key adult education philosophies of liberal, behaviourist, progressive, humanist and radical described above, Lorraine Zinn (1983; 1994; 1998) developed a classic questionnaire that teachers can use to help identify the perspective(s) to which they are most drawn. The Philosophy of Adult Education Inventory (PAEI) is available for free on the LabR Learning Resources webpage. To complete the questionnaire, respond to each inventory question by selecting from a scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. Once you have submitted your responses, an inventory of results will be emailed to you. Most teachers are drawn to more than just one philosophical perspective.

Creative Strategies

Try the ‘Philosophy of Adult Education Inventory’

Visit [http://www.labr.net/apps/paei/](http://www.labr.net/apps/paei/) and complete the Philosophy of Adult Education Inventory. Are the results you received what you expected? Do you agree with the results you received? Did the results help you determine which philosophy (or philosophies) seem a good fit for you?

Five Perspectives on Teaching Adults

General philosophies of education can be contrasted with the specific ideas teachers have about what they do and would like to do in their day-to-day practice. A teaching perspective is an inter-related set of beliefs and intentions that justifies and directs teachers’ actions (Pratt, 1998). Teaching perspectives are more than teaching styles. They “determine our roles and idealized self-images as teachers as well as the basis for reflecting on practice.” (Pratt, 1998, p.35). Pratt, Collins and Selinger’s (2001) seminal work examining teachers’ actions, intentions and beliefs describes five perspectives on teaching: transmission, apprenticeship, developmental, nurturing and social reform.

*Transmission* teachers strive for effective delivery of content. They are masters of subject matter. They set high standards for achievement and direct students to useful resources. They provide reviews, summaries and objective methods of assessing learning. They clarify misunderstandings, answer questions and correct errors.

*Apprenticeship* teachers model ways of being. They “reveal the inner workings of skilled performance and must now translate it into accessible language and an ordered set of tasks” (Pratt & Collins, n.d. p.2). They guide students from simple to more complex activities and gradually withdraw as learners assume more responsibility for their learning.

*Developmental* teachers cultivate ways of thinking. They believe teaching is planned and focused from the learner’s point of view. They seek to understand how learners are thinking and reasoning and then try to support them toward
more sophisticated ways of comprehending content. They provide meaningful examples and use questions to move learners from simple to more complex ways of thinking.

**Nurturing** teachers facilitate self-efficacy. They have confidence in their students. They believe their students succeed because of their own efforts and abilities, not the benevolence of a teacher. They teach “from the heart as well as the head” (Pratt & Collins, p.4).

**Social Reform** teachers seek a better society. They endeavour to make significant changes at the societal level. They are interested in the values and ideologies that are part of everyday practice.

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### Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI)

Another highly regarded inventory to help teachers articulate their own philosophy of teaching is the Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI) developed by University of British Columbia professor Daniel Pratt and associates (Pratt, 1998; Pratt & Collins, n.d.). The TPI is available for free on the [Teaching Perspectives Inventory website](http://www.teachingperspectives.com/tpi/). Once you have submitted your responses, a profile of results will be emailed to you. This profile reflects your dominant, back-up and recessive perspectives. Further instructions for interpreting and understanding your profile are posted on the website.

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### Creative Strategies

**Try the ‘Teaching Perspectives Inventory’**

Visit [http://www.teachingperspectives.com/tpi/](http://www.teachingperspectives.com/tpi/) and complete the Teaching Perspectives Inventory. Review your profile in relation to the instructions on the Reflecting on Results tab. Most teachers embrace aspects of all five perspectives. However, the TPI will identify dominant, back-up and recessive perspectives that are unique to you. Keep a record of your profile and complete the inventory again from time to time to observe any changes that may occur.

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### From the Field

**What is My Philosophy of Teaching?**

A teaching philosophy includes reflections on our beliefs about teaching and how we act on those beliefs in our everyday teaching practice. Although senior clinical instructors may have developed and established their personal philosophy, new teachers may not yet have had such opportunities.

During orientation, take some dedicated time to reflect on the question “What is my philosophy of teaching?” Begin your reflections by thinking about your hopes when you first applied for a teaching position. Write down your thoughts and be sure to revisit and revise your views at the beginning and end of each term you teach.

Beginning to put our beliefs into words is an important first step in the ongoing process of establishing a philosophy of teaching. Teaching is different from bedside nursing. Understanding our philosophy can help create balance during times when teaching tasks such as client assessment seem to override more complex teaching topics such as empathy.
It can also help when new areas of expertise and responsibility seem overwhelming.

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