

Course Portfolio
Madison Delks
Indiana University

Personal Philosophy of Adult Education

Until this semester, I had never thought about how philosophies of education play such an important role in how educators teach and in the methods, theories, and concepts they use in both formal and informal education. I took Lorraine Zinn's Philosophy of Adult Education Inventory (PAEI) for the first time this semester and this inventory helped me start thinking about my own philosophy of education. The first time I took this inventory, I scored most high (practically tying) in the humanistic and progressive approach. However, as this semester concludes and I have now retaken the inventory, I have scored most high on the humanistic approach. According to Zinn (1998), humanistic education encourages personal growth, self-directed learning, and the belief that all humans have limitless learning potential. As I was learning about each of the educational philosophies over this semester, I was amazed at how unique each philosophy truly is, yet there is overlap in each. I have thoroughly enjoyed the process of determining my own educational philosophy. Throughout this paper, you will see this humanistic educational philosophy shine through as I analyze each educational philosophy.

Liberal Education

Liberal education in its' truest form is an *intellectual* education. Within this philosophy, a student learns by receiving information, which leads to knowledge, which then produces wisdom. Ultimately, "Liberal education produces a person who is literate in the broadest sense- intellectually, morally, spiritually, and aesthetically" (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p.31). The different ways this type of education is achieved can be seen through movements like- the Great Books, the Junto, Lyceum Movement, and the Chautauqua. Within the liberal education philosophy I do appreciate the study of the classics, moral education, and the emphasis on

practical wisdom. However, I think this philosophy puts too much emphasis on things of the past and its' roots are deep in an elitist type of education.

In its' historical roots, liberal education was only offered to those who were intellectually prepared for it, though this has changed over time and has been changed and adapted more for the masses. However, the focus of liberal education is still "oriented toward conceptual and theoretical understanding rather than mere transmission and absorption of factual knowledge or development of technical skills" (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p.34). With that being said, I think this type of education *does* create a divide in who can actually benefit from a liberal education. I think liberal education would do well to focus on the ideals of Robert Hutchins. He promotes liberal education as an education for the masses, one that promotes wisdom and communication. Liberal education should, at its' core, help produce communicative, well rounded citizens who can read, write, and think for themselves. This approach is one that I could defend and promote.

As for the teaching style used most in liberal education- lecture style teaching- I cannot promote that. I believe students learn best when there are high levels of interaction in these four types of interactions: learner-instructor, learner-learner, learner-content, and instructor-content (Merrill & Young, 2012, p. 40). Lecture style teaching does not fully engage students and does not help create an environment rich for learning. When students are actively engaged in all of those areas, there is more opportunity for them to grow and develop.

Progressive Education

The progressive philosophy of education has had a lasting, valuable impact on education. Unlike liberal education, progressive education focuses on vocational training, experiential learning, and problem solving for real world problems. I find this educational philosophy to be a more practical type of education. In this philosophy, there is a focus on learners past experiences,

which I believe to be an important part of how students approach learning experiences. In Lindeman's article, he states "...the resource of highest value in adult education is the learner's experience" (Lindeman, 1961, p. 34). As students learn new things, there is typically a question of *is this new knowledge going to be of value to me?* Students are more likely to retain and appreciate knowledge when they find use for it. Past experiences can dictate whether they deem this new information to be useful. Learning can be highly personal and I believe people learn best when they see value in what is being taught, when they see value, intrinsic motivation is more likely to be present. Intrinsic motivation is what drives students to learn. According to Kanuka (2008), "the act of learning is a personal activity that involves intrinsic motivations, self-concept, perception, and self-evaluation" (p.107). Teachers should take into account each learner's intrinsic (or lack of) intrinsic motivation. Students need their intrinsic motivations to be high, in order for them to be more apt to learn and retain.

Progressive education feeds the need for real world application; however, where progressive education falls short is its' sidelining of some of the humanities, history, literature and the arts (Elias & Merriam, 2005). Focusing on vocational training, experiential learning and application to social problems is invaluable, but the subject matter stated above is *just* as important when encouraging a student to be a lifelong learner. I can use this practical application side of the progressive philosophy; however, I cannot utilize its narrow subject matter. Moreover, my personal teaching style does align with this philosophy in regard to the student and teacher relationship. Within progressive education, the student and teacher relationship is highly valued and the teacher takes on a facilitator role within the educational experience. Allison King's phrase used in Bailey and Card's article (2009) about changing to a facilitator style of teaching sums up the change from the liberal to progressive style of teaching: "from sage

on the stage to guide on the side” (p. 153). I appreciate this quote and feel like this concept is part of my own educational philosophy.

Behaviorist Education

The behaviorist education philosophy is rooted in science, much of this philosophy is related to the findings of B.F Skinner. Skinner believed that “their environment, the conditions of which can be studied, specified, and manipulated, controls humans” (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 88). He helped the world understand the difference between classical and operant conditioning and paired personality down to a science stating that it is a “repertoire of behavior imported by an organized set of contingencies” (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 89). I find value in the uniqueness of individuals and I don’t think behaviorism takes into account the whole person. The behavioristic philosophy helps us understand “what makes a person do what they do,” but I don’t think it takes into account the individuality, emotions or creativity of people. I also don’t like the competency based or skills based testing that comes along with this philosophy. I understand there is some subject matter where this type of evaluation is needed; however, I don’t think this is most helpful in the assessment of student’s knowledge. When thinking through what types of assessment are best to assess a learner’s knowledge, Bloom’s Taxonomy is a helpful tool to guide learning objectives and assessment. The higher one goes up on Bloom’s pyramid, transfer of learning is more likely to be seen in a student’s learning experience. Each of the levels have value and build upon each other, but making sure the higher levels of assessment are in a teacher’s assessment and application methods are important (Adams, 2015).

The behaviorist philosophy relies heavily on reinforcement, and I do think there is a place for reinforcement of material within teaching. I think this philosophy is best utilized in teaching environments that require very regulated trainings, one where it is competency based, repetitive

skills that need to be taught, or even for *some* professional development trainings. I am quite picky when it comes to what I think I can use from this educational philosophy. However, one area of this philosophy I do think I can use as a guide for structuring my own educational plans is Herman's individualized instruction plan.

Step 1: Specify Behavioral Goals

Step 2. Analyze the Learning Task-sequence material in a logical progression.

Step 3. Assess Entry Behavior-identify what your students or you already know.

Step 4: Plan Presentation-provide cues, feedback, reinforcement, and self-pacing.

Step 5: Evaluate, record, and adjust. (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 99)

I found myself quickly liking this plan; however, after reading more about what other professional's think about Herman's instruction plan I am finding that much of this pulls from the humanistic philosophy of education. This might be why I took a liking to it. I also appreciate the self-pacing portion of this guide and believe this can help a student become more self-directed in their learning.

Radical and Critical Education

The radical and critical education philosophies call for political, societal, economical and world change. When I first read about these philosophies, I found the plight of them to be quite daunting. As seen by my educational philosophies inventory, radical education was one of my lowest scoring areas. As I have thought through *why* my scores were so low, I have come to the conclusion that I feel my first priority as an educator is to help a person become a lifelong learner. As we teach student to be life long learners, students start the journey to improving their own quality of life and this in turn helps create an outward focus, this outward focus moves them to better their own communities and then advocate for social justice. With that being said, I feel

as if the more “lofty” ideals of the radical and critical educational philosophies will come later in a person’s lifelong learning pursuits. Many people don’t see education in that same way, which is why we have these philosophies which stands alone. I certainly see value in radical and critical education.

I do appreciate the reliance on dialogue seen throughout these philosophies. One of the great educators of these philosophies Paulo Freire, believed that “a group of persons, through dialogue, come to realize the concrete oppressive situation, and possible solutions to their problems” (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 158). To create this type of dialogue, Freire encouraged a strong teacher- student relationship, where there was trust and openness. In environments with high student-to-student and teacher-student interactions, students feel accepted, welcomed, and feel like part of a community. This type of interaction helps foster an environment where students can work together toward learning outcomes or goals (The Online Learning Consortium, 2014). These philosophies demand educators to steer away from the concept of “banking education,” which is another thing I like about these philosophies. As educators, we must allow the learners to be creative, to help lead their own educational discussions, to allow students to critically think without a biased basis of information. (Freire, 1995). Though I find the concepts and goals of the radical and critical philosophies to be strived towards, I think many of these goals will be produced as a student progresses through their life as a lifelong learner.

Postmodern Education

I would compare learning about the postmodern educational philosophy to the Disney movie Beauty and the Beast. When I was first introduced to postmodern education, I felt it was a horrible beast. A beast that was horribly pessimistic and rejected logical thinking; I thought this beast was almost laughable. However, over time, I started seeing the positives to this philosophy

and now I *strangely* appreciate it. Philosophers who identify as postmodernists each have their own twist on what postmodernism truly is and each of them fall under different categories: establishment postmodernism, radical critical postmodernism, deconstructive or eliminative postmodernism, constructive or revisionary postmodernism, hot and cool postmodernism, neoconservative postmodernism, poststructural postmodernism, reaction postmodernism, and finally, resistance postmodernism (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 222). With all of these ways to identify as a postmodernist, I found the best way to be a postmodernist is to *believe what I want to believe*. The part of postmodernism I feel I can use most is its rejection of truth.

Postmodernism at its core rejects truth, because truth is what a person decides is truth.

At the beginning of this postmodern section I said I *strangely* appreciate postmodernism, the reason I say this is because I appreciate this nagging philosophy of thought: “How do you know what you know is true?” Within this philosophy, I am challenged to evaluate what I think about self, history, time, geography, theory, truth, representation, epistemology, methodology, political orientations, and social sciences. There is a *beauty* in the questioning. Once a person stops questioning, I think they stop learning. I think incorporating this philosophy of questioning into my own personal educational philosophy is incredibly helpful to not only myself, but also to the learners. I also found Collin’s idea of bracketing as a helpful tool that is grounded in postmodern thinking. Bracketing is where a person sets aside (or sometimes attempts to set aside) their preconceived ideas and past learning experiences to assess the learning experiences at hand. I think this concept can be tied to postmodernism and is an interesting way of creating authentic learning environments (Collins, 1995). Postmodernism is a philosophy that I will never particularly fully align my beliefs with; however, there is value in the type of thinking this educational philosophy can bring about.

Humanistic Education

The humanistic educational philosophy is my personal educational philosophy. I appreciate this philosophies' view of the learner. A humanistic philosopher believes that students have unlimited potential and tries to help maximize that student's potential. The student-teacher relationship in this philosophy is an important one. Even historically, this philosophy was meant to help learners grow and develop in a loving environment. Earlier in my paper, I shared my belief that learners first should focus on themselves, then their eyes might turn outward to their community, and then to society. I really like this quote from the humanistic portion of our textbook, which I think sums up my thinking about education. "The result of the educative process would be humanist persons who were emotionally secure, intellectually alive, and socially active (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 115)." When students are encouraged to be life-long learners and self-directed in their learning, I think social justice (found more in the radical philosophy of our book) will eventually shine through. I think there is a lot of intermingling between the philosophies. I do see value in establishing one's own personal educational philosophy and I also see value in understanding the educational philosophies of others.

Through my evaluation of the first five philosophies, there were a few things that should have stood out as items rooted in the humanistic philosophy. The first being the need for high levels of interaction in relationships: learner-instructor, learner-learner, learner-content, and instructor-content. Within these interactions, instructor-student and student-student being important relationships that can determine a student's effectiveness in working toward learning goals. Second, having the professor act as a facilitator instead of a "sage on the stage," is most conducive to creating an authentic learning environment. This type of thinking contributes to the learner-instructor relationship. Third, taking into account a learner's past experiences when

planning and creating curriculum is a humanistic activity that allows a teacher to plan with the students in mind. Fourth, I think there is a place for both bracketing and planning with student's experiences in mind within the humanistic philosophy. Bracketing is something a teacher is challenging students to do and planning with the students experiences in mind is activity on the teacher's part. Herman's individualized instruction plan also has humanistic touches to it as well. The third step in his guide is Assess Entry Behavior (identify what your students or you already know), this ties into understanding a student's past experiences. Lastly, engaging students in dialogue is a method straight from the humanistic philosophy. All of these things create a small part of what I believe makes up the humanistic philosophy and my own personal educational philosophy.

As for what goes on in the classroom, I believe following the guidelines set by Carl Rogers are a helpful tool in creating an authentic learning environment. Here is what you could find in my own fictitious classroom, following Carl Rogers guide. As a teacher with a humanistic educational philosophy, I would first "set the stage" for the students, meaning I would help set the tone or mood of the class in my first interactions with them. I would welcoming them and let them know that the class environment is one of open discussion, and I would encourage them to fully interact in the four different areas of interaction. To help take into account the learner's experiences, I would allow this class' purpose to be open for discussion or interpretation. I would encourage the students to be active participants and to be self-directed in their learning. I would also be sure to follow Carl Roger's advice and "make easily available the widest possible range of resources for learning" (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 127). As the class goes on, I will have built up so much trust with the learners what I would be seen as a learner or as part of the group.

Moreover, I would also embrace the notion that I don't know everything and that I, too, am in my own lifelong learning process (Elias & Merriam, 2005).

Now that I understand the differences between the educational philosophies, I feel like my eyes have been opened to a whole new world of appreciation for how teachers teach. I think there is value in understanding your own educational philosophy to help guide your decisions as an educator in what methods or concepts or strategies you use in teaching others. What I have liked most about learning about educational philosophies, is that there is not a single educational philosophy that can be deemed "right" or "perfect." I liked that we were able to see the flaws in every single philosophy discussed this semester. I have a new appreciation for the theoretical viewpoints I have been exposed to this semester and really feel like this information is *valuable* to be. I know over time, I will change and perfect my personal philosophy of education, but that is the beauty of learning. I am a firm believer in encouraging everyone to be a lifelong learner and when I am teaching from a humanistic philosophy I see how I can clearly foster this type of learning in students...and it excites me.

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